

Hello again from the World of Warcraft UI Engineering team! As the Alpha phase of Midnight comes to a close and Beta begins, we would like to take a moment to hit the pause button, answer some of your most common questions, and reflect on the process so far.

But first, we would like to thank you again for all your feedback posts (yes, even the spicy ones). We have been keeping a close eye on the issues you have raised in the *#addon-restrictions-feedback* channel and have created over 50 tasks and bugs from them so far. We know that analyzing each set of changes, making necessary updates to your addon code and providing us with this feedback takes time and effort for you and we truly appreciate you taking the time to do so.

What is the goal of this initiative?

Ion covers this subject in much more detail in his post, but perhaps the simplest way to express the overall philosophy of this project is: *Addons should not be able to provide a competitive advantage in combat*. While preventing addons from being able to trivialize encounter mechanics is certainly part of this goal, that isn't the entirety of the goal. Any time a plurality of players agrees that a certain addon is required to perform competitively in end game content or with a certain spec, that is a problem. While we have no issue with addons customizing how combat information we show in our UI is presented to players (whether for accessibility or personal preference reasons), players should never feel like they are at a competitive disadvantage if they choose not to use an addon.

What specific functionality are we aiming to prevent addons from providing?

1. Making encounter decisions for the player

Reasoning: When addons can process combat information to make decisions for players, it means that players no longer need to make these decisions themselves. This in turn lowers the challenge in our combat and encounters, but only for players using these addons. To make up for this reduction in challenge, our designers must rely more heavily on twitch gameplay (shorter enemy cast times, increased punishment for not executing perfectly). This results in players who choose not to use addons (and even those that do in some cases) having to deal with a much higher level of moment-to-moment complexity.

APIs Affected: The most obvious APIs that allow addons to provide this functionality are combat log events, addon communication and player debuffs. Enemy information (spellcasts, auras, health, power) is also involved. But there are also cases where player

or group member health and power can be used to make these decisions, so we have been cautious about exposing those values fully as well. We know that not having full access to some of this combat information is a burden for other types of addons as well (e.g. unit frame addons), so we are actively looking for ways to address the pain points in those usages without making this information non-secret.

2. Creating optimal rotation helpers

Reasoning: Rotation helpers in and of themselves are not something we view as harmful. The same goes for addons that allow players to keep track of their cooldowns. Teaching players how to play their spec at a baseline level or helping them remember that a cooldown is ready are things we support. Unfortunately, the same information that allows addons to create a simple rotation helper can also be used to show players the truly optimal action to take at any given time. Another way to think about this is that we have no issues with addons allowing a player to perform at a competent level, but when an addon allows players to perform at a truly optimal level, it gives those players an unfair advantage. This is why our Combat Assistant feature is non-optimal by design, aiming to help players achieve average or even slightly above average DPS, but never fully optimal DPS. Performing at the very highest levels should always require practice and skill.

APIs Affected: The primary APIs that allow addons to provide this functionality are those that return information about the player's cooldowns and auras, and it is for this reason that these APIs are likely to remain secret. Again, we recognize that many addons use these APIs for other purposes (e.g. action bar addons), so providing workarounds for those cases is one of our primary focuses in Beta.

3. Simplifying enemy names (e.g. "Healer"), cast names ("Frontal"), or colorizing unit nameplates based on priority

Reasoning: While this functionality may seem somewhat benign at first, it has played an important part in reducing the challenge level in end-game content over the last several years, particularly in M+. For most of WoW's history, learning which enemies were the highest priority or what to do when a certain spell is being cast has required knowledge, built up through practice and research. But when addons are able to call out exactly which enemies to kill first, which casts to interrupt and which enemies to run away from, that knowledge is no longer necessary. With that knowledge and mastery no longer required, we must compensate through other means in order to

maintain a satisfying level of challenge for players. Larger packs of enemies become the norm, as do shorter cast times on lethal spells. Essentially, we are forced to replace mastery and knowledge gained through time with twitch gameplay that punishes players who aren't using addons and/or have slower reaction times. We recognize that our current naming approach does not always provide enough clarity, especially with longer creature or cast names, so we are also working on ways to address this on the design side for Midnight.

APIs Affected: APIs that allow addons to identify specific enemies and enemy spellcasts are the primary ones that need to be locked down to prevent this behavior.

Without addons providing this functionality, won't players be shut out of content they enjoy?

This is one of the most common worries we have heard expressed not only among addon developers but among players at large. The important thing to remember here is that we are not making these addon changes in a vacuum; they are being paired with significant changes to our combat and encounters as well. Now that addons will no longer be able to think for the player, we have been able to reduce our reliance on the measures we leaned on previously to provide challenge.

When players are not told immediately what to do when an enemy starts casting a lethal spell, we can increase the cast time on that spell. When players affected by a certain debuff are not automatically marked by an addon so other players can stack on or run away from them, we can give players more time to realize what they should do in those situations and then execute. And when addons cannot tell the player exactly which spell to cast at any given time, we can reduce the complexity of our spec rotations, so players can decide on their own which spell to cast next. We have been busy making these needed adjustments to our classes and encounters and look forward to players being able to experience them in Beta and after launch.

How these changes affect accessibility has been one of our main focuses throughout this project, and we are of the strong belief that we should be adding necessary accessibility features to our base game and not relying solely on addons to pick up that slack. As such, we have been adding accessibility-focused features (like the new Combat Audio Alert system, and sound alerts in Cooldown Manager) throughout Alpha and will continue to work on them all the way up through launch. We know that we won't have time to bring every addon accessibility feature into the base game by launch, and there will be a great deal of accessibility functionality that addons *can* still provide in Midnight. So we are

focusing on the features that addons will no longer be able to provide first, with many more features coming post launch.

Reflections on Alpha, Plans for Beta

Alpha has been a whirlwind of activity for our team, filled with ongoing work on these addon restrictions as well as the many UI features in Midnight (Cooldown Manager, Nameplates, Damage Meters, External Defensives, and more). We are happy with how the Secret Value system has performed and with the adjustments we have made throughout Alpha, but we also recognize that we still have a *lot* of work ahead of us.

Your feedback is absolutely *vital* in this process. We know the things we want to prevent addons from doing, and which APIs need to be changed to accomplish that. What is often a lot harder for us to predict is exactly how those changes will affect addons attempting to provide *other* types of functionality. This is an area where you, as addon developers, are truly the experts and as such we are reliant on your feedback to point out these pain points.

With that in mind, our plans for Beta are centered around the following:

1. *Concentrating our efforts on making the highest-impact changes to reduce pain points for addons*

We acknowledge that we are not going to have time to address all the pain points you have been pointing out before prepatch, so it is of utmost importance that we identify and work on the changes that will have the largest possible impact.

2. *Opening direct communication lines with more addon developers*

Concentrating on the highest-impact changes requires us to be able to identify exactly what those high priority changes are, so we would like to reach out to more of you directly to chat. While we have had (and continue to have) direct contact with a number of different addon developers, we are looking to broaden that reach in Beta. Time is limited, so we will be concentrating these efforts mostly on developers of widely used addon libraries (particularly those that facilitate visual customizations). We will be reaching out to some of you over the coming weeks to open those lines of communication. Please know that even if you aren't among this group, it doesn't mean that your feedback is not important to us. We will continue to monitor all of your feedback threads and make necessary tasks from them.

Thank you again for all your feedback so far. We hope this post helps provide some of the clarity you have been seeking. We will be keeping a close eye on discussions so we can further clarify things if needed. See you all in Beta!