

Guild Wars 2 (GW) is a massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMO) released on the PC. Story, graphics, and gameplay elements are all important aspects to making a successful game, but at the core of any successful game is the user experience. The game has to provide the correct tools to make the player's interaction with the game world enjoyable. In game design, the user interface is a key aspect to the user experience because it's the fundamental way in which the state of the game world is represented to the player. This is not to say that a video game can get away with having bad story elements by having an awesome user interface, but a great video game will be unplayable if the interface does not support the user's goals. Imagine driving a Ferrari with a glass-stained windshield and a poorly designed dashboard where the text is unreadable; I'm sure it would still feel great to throttle the engine, but the car would be undriveable, unless of course you were looking to enter the crash n' smash derby. So maybe a little bit of an exaggerated analogy, but I wanted to make the point that driving is a lot like playing an MMORPG in the sense that both require attention to the world around you. In an MMO, like GW, you will always find yourself interacting with something or having to choose where to allocate your attention. Without further ado, let's get to the user interface, which is the user's window into the game world.

I'm choosing the GW2 user interface, also called the heads-up display (figure 1). It is the main way in which the state of the world and in-game character is presented to the user. That being said, the UI serves two functions. The first is to present the user with all the necessary information required for the player to make an informed decision in how to proceed in the game world. The second is to provide a positive playing experience to the user. In this sense, the UI plays a pivotal role in the user experience, and should follow the principles of usability and design for the best user experience. The UI is too expansive to actually cover in full detail, so I will exclusively focus on the UI that is related to three key areas of gameplay, which will be discussed later. For now, let's start with the users, which of course are gamers, but not all gamers are alike. Gamers in the MMO genre fall under three categories: hardcore, casual, and newbies. To provide some context, MMO's typically focus on long-term longevity and creating/maintaining a strong fan base due to the fact that MMO's have long development cycles that can last anywhere from four to six years. This means that these titles are extremely expensive to make, and that a company usually has one chance at success. The focus then becomes on designing an interface that supports all categories of gamers. This is where it becomes necessary to analyze our users and look at each gamer sub-type individually.



Figure 1: 3 main areas of interface

- 1 – Communication
- 2 – Decision making
- 3 - Navigation

## Gamer Types

To recap, our users are the players of Guild Wars II, which are further classified as either being hardcore, casual, or newbies. The importance of making this distinction of sub-categories is related to the differing level of familiarity and play style among each gamer type, which will have important implications for how the interface is designed.

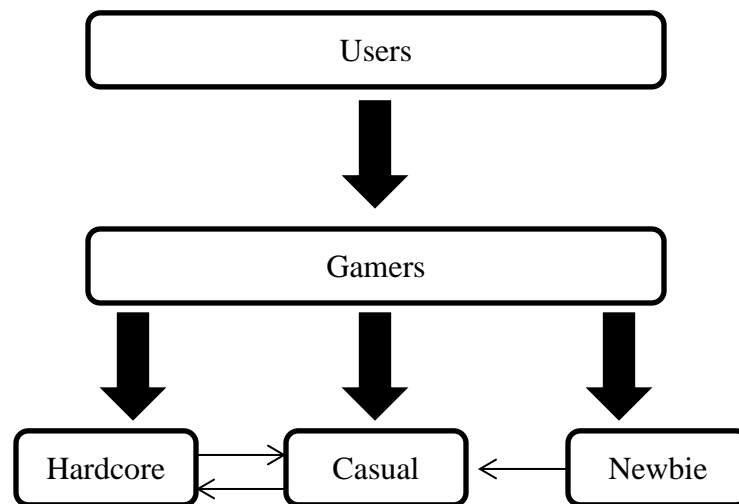


Figure 2: User Diagram

**Hardcore** – Their defining trait is that they play for the end game power, and not so much for the thrill of the story. We might characterize their play style as being regimented, structured, and linear where they aren't really playing for the fun and social experience, but to be the best.

**Casual** – These users play for the story, and are more concerned about exploring the environment and socializing with others. Play style tends to be sporadic, playing some days and then not playing for weeks at a time. These users play to relax.

**Newbie** – Not characterized by play style, but by familiarity. These are players who are new to the category for MMO's. They might have stumbled onto the MMO scene by accident, or through word of mouth. The newbie is more of a precursor than anything else and will eventually turn into casual or hardcore gamers depending on play style.

## **Design Implications**

So, the distinguishing characteristic between a casual and hardcore gamer is in their play style, whereas familiarity becomes the factor to consider when designing an interface for newbies. Familiarity is not an issue to consider at the hardcore/casual level because these users are either veterans of the virtual world, longtime fans of the series who played Guild Wars I (released 2005), or gamers with prior MMO experience. Generalizations in interface design are quite standard in MMOs, so casual and hardcore players are already quite familiar with the layout of the interface, which makes it easier for them to navigate (figure 9 & 10). However, for those new to the MMO genre, there is a lot to take in compared to a first-person shooter or adventure game. The choices available are overwhelming. This means that when designing for a newbie it is important to not clutter the interface with too much information, which may lead to sensory overload and have the unfortunate consequence of creating an unhappy-confused-stressed user. You want the interface to be as user-friendly as possible for new players, but at the same time offer the complexity and customization that hardcore/casual gamers expect from a user interface. You don't want to dumb-down the UI by oversimplifying it, which might insult your hardcore/casual demographic and create dissatisfaction among that user group. Back to the topic of play styles, the question becomes, "how do you design an interface that caters to both hardcore and casual gamers, with almost entirely opposite play styles?" The reason I feel the GW II interface is so successful is because it was designed in such a way that satisfied the needs of all types of gamers. This was done by establishing three central user goals/tasks that all categories of gamers find important: communication, navigation, and decision making. A detailed look at how the interface accomplishes each of these goals will follow, and although the interface is not perfect, it's pretty solid in constructing a positive user experience.

## **Communication**

Rodya J. Perez  
Assignment II: Guild Wars 2 Interface



Figure 3



Figure 4





Figure 5

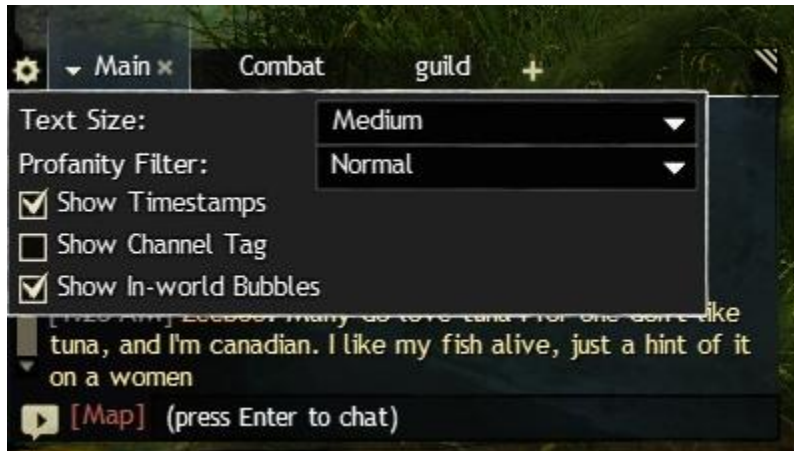


Figure 6

## Design Principles

Communication amongst teammates and other players is essential in an MMO just as it is in real life. Referring to figure 5, we can see that visibility is accomplished through button use, iconography, and clearly written text. Providing an icon image in conjunction with a button ensures that recognition, and not recall is promoted. Affordance is accomplished by playing on knowledge that a user most likely already has and is entirely perceived affordance since this is a GUI. In this case, the chat window functions in much the same way that a web browser does. For example, the x button (number 3) closes the tab, the + (number 4) opens a new tab, the down arrow (# 2) opens a cascading window with more options, and the diagonal arrow (# 5) allows the user to stretch the window. Where it is not readily known what a button does, take the gear icon (# 1) for example, the designers use the principle of feedback to put users at ease; especially newbie users who may be afraid of pressing a button thinking they might break the interface. By clicking on the gear icon, a new window emerges with the following options (figure 6). In using, drop down boxes and check-mark boxes, newbie users are presented with a visual interface that is familiar to them. Furthermore, feedback is instantaneous, so users are readily able to see the

changes they make to the drop-box menu. Figures 3 & 4 offers a little more advanced feature, which is the idea of customizing the user interface. Notice how the text box changes from being at the bottom left of the screen, to the upper left corner of the screen. However, Figure 4 also displays the principle of constraining the user's action by only allowing the user to move the text box to where the white outline is shown. This conscious design choice was made due to the fact that the right side of screen is reserved for navigation.

Overall, the interface does a solid job at supporting communication that is both suitable for newbie, hardcore, and casual gamers. With regards to usability, it does a fantastic job at meeting usability goals. By using an interface metaphor (the web browser) that users are already accustomed too, any user instantly knows how to use it making it easy to learn and easy to remember. Furthermore, the use of tabs makes it easier to keep track of conversations and the range of customization offered makes the textbox both effective and efficient. There is one short sight in the interface though and it relates to the singular interface type supported. It's nice to communicate through text, but the interface could have been given higher utility if it supported voice chat.

## Navigation



Figure 7

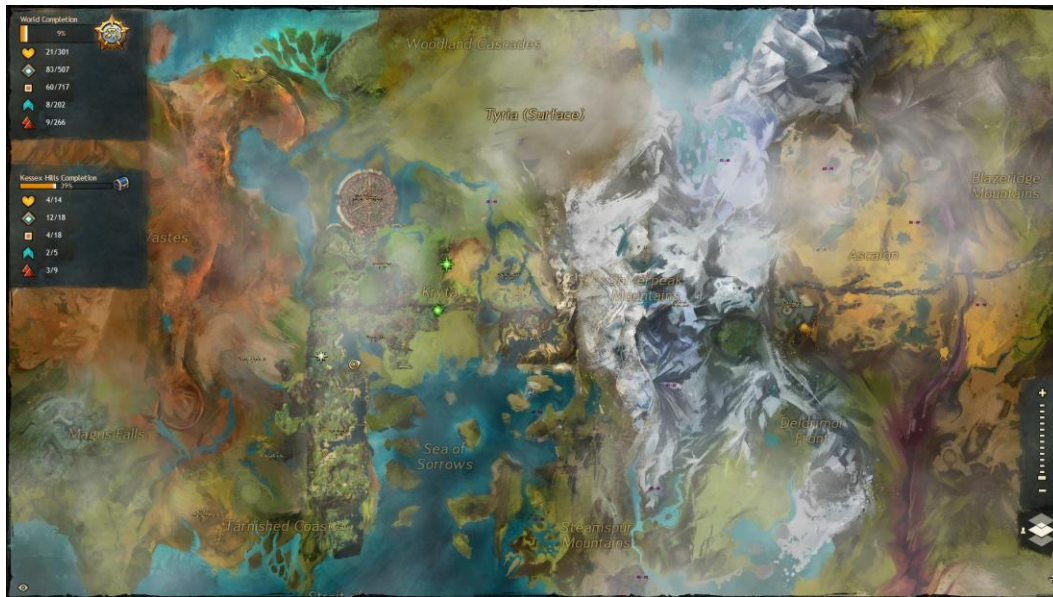


Figure 8

Travelling in the Guild Wars world is the second kind of goal that a user would have. Here, getting from point A to point B makes use of our real world use of artifacts such as maps. It relies on our cultural understanding of map usage, even displaying a compass at the bottom right corner. However, the map interface (figure 8) does not allow annotation, which diminishes its functionality as a proper artifact. Professor Ed Hutchins discusses the idea of offloading cognition by using pen and paper to write things down, which reduces the resources we allocate to mental computation. So instead of having to remember important locations on a map, we mark them with pen or use other artifacts like physical markers. However, the interface in GW does not support any such annotation methods, instead only showing markers (waypoints) to quest locations (the green dots shown on figure 8). Maybe these changes will be added later, but for now, the map interface is lacking.

## Decision-Making

Refer to figure 10 and then compare that the figure 9 (Guild Wars I UI). You will notice some overlap in design layout (points of reference shown in red). This kind of consistency is done so as to not ruin the familiarity that longtime fans are accustomed too. However, there are many changes to the UI that was done to make it support all types of gamers. With GW II, the designers decided to take a minimalist approach to designing the interface, where only information that was required at the moment was made salient. Referring to figure 11, your character is found swimming so the interface dynamically changes to hide areas 1 and 2 (figure 1), so that you can focus on the gorgeous scenery. Back to comparing figure 9 and 10, aesthetically the interface in GW II is better. It's not cluttered for one, instead much of the interface options like the ability to customize your character has been centralized to the Hero Menu you see in figure 10. Also pay close attention to the tabs on the left hand side of the hero menu, which allows you to perform different functions of character customization. Instead of having 5 different windows open like in figure 9, you have one central hub from which you can navigate around from.





Figure 9



Figure 10





Figure 11

## Conclusion

In conclusion, functionality, layout, and aesthetic design are what sets the UI of GW II apart from other MMO UI's out there. It's easy to see that the user needs were always central to the design of the interface, and that's why I feel GW II has created a successful user interface.