

Death Knight Strategies / Tips

General abilities

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Note: When reading strategy guides always keep in mind that people have different ability levels and play styles. One particular guide may or may not fit your style, strengths, and what you find enjoyable to play. Strive to do your best, let the guides be your forge, but don't let anyone force you into a style that does not come naturally. Choose talents and strategies that *you* find enjoyable. After all, why would it matter if you “have the best build for your class” if you aren't having fun?

As a melee class you'll want to train for all of the weapons you can use and buy (or loot) each of those weapons. They don't have to be great, but you'll want something to skill up with. When you level I recommend you get as close to max with each skill you can as soon as possible. Even if your are leveling weapons that aren't your current main weapon type it is a good idea to keep all of your skills as maxed as possible in case a good weapon of that type does drop or in case you change your mind about which weapons you want to use. (Or in the event you join a group which desperately needs you to fill that role.)

The weapons Death Knight can (currently) use are:

Axes, Swords, Mace (must be trained)

Two-Handed Axes, Polearms, Two-Handed Swords, Two-Handed Mace (must be trained)

Core abilities



Anti-Magic Shell

20 runic power, 45 second cooldown

Surrounds the Death Knight in an Anti-Magic Shell, absorbing 75% of the damage dealt by harmful spells (up to a maximum of 50% of the Death Knight's health) and preventing application of harmful magical effects. Damage absorbed by the Anti-Magic shell energizes the Death Knight with additional runic power.

Damage reduction/Tanking/Survival: This is a good defense when fighting spell casters.



Blood Tap

6% of base health, 1 minute cooldown

Immediately activates (readies) a Blood Rune and converts it into a Death Rune for the next 20 seconds.

Survival/DPS: This ability can be helpful to either use as a panic move to help keep you alive by readying a rune for use by something like Vampiric Blood (Blood), Rune Tap (Blood), or other life saving ability, or as a means to reset a rune in order to do damage.



Blood Boil

1 Blood

Boils the blood of all enemies within 10 yards dealing x-y Shadow damage. Deals additional damage to targets infected with Blood Plague or Frost Fever.

PBAE Damage/Taunt: This ability is ok for snap agro/threat, but it uses up a blood rune. This is a decent way for a Blood build to get AE threat (while in Frost Presence), as they have no AE abilities in the line. However, it does use up your main rune type. (Heart Strike is not a true AE ability, as it only hits one other target.) There is an AE damage component to the spell and it does a good amount of damage, on par with Death Coil and Icy Touch. The only limitation is that Blood Boil is point blank (centered around yourself).



Chains of Ice

1 Frost

Shackles the target with frozen chains, reducing their movement by -95%. The target regains 10% of their movement speed each second for 10 seconds.

Pull/Slow: If there are multiple targets in a group Chains of Ice can be used to keep targets out of a pull.

Say there are two targets in a group. If you Ice Chain one it will get the attention of both targets, however, only the second target will close range quickly, as the first will be slowed. You can also use this multiple times (I tend to wait till the rune is 50% recharged) to further extend the time it will take for this first target to reach the group, increasing the time you have to finish off the target which wasn't slowed. Used in combination with a second Death Knight using Death Grip you can quickly separate targets. (A 'push one / pull one' tactic.)



Dark Command

no cost, 8 second cooldown

Commands the target to attack you, but has no effect if the target is already attacking you.

Taunt: Your primary taunt. Used in combination with Death Grip you can easily have the attention of two targets.



Death and Decay

1 Blood, 1 Frost, 1 Unholy, 30 second cooldown

Corrupts the ground targeted by the Death Knight, causing x Shadow damage every second that targets remain in the area for 10 seconds. This ability produces a high amount of threat.

PBAE Damage/Taunt: This ability is really good for taunting, but it taps a lot of your runes (50% of your total.) I only recommend this when fighting multiple targets, as 1 or 2 can more efficiently be taunted and controlled by Dark Command and Death Grip which take no runes, freeing up those runes for other abilities. For those in your group unfamiliar with the ability, tell them to consider this a 'fight critters here' marker.

AE Damage: There is an AE damage component to the spell, which can be helpful for multiple targets. Again, with just 1 or 2 targets I don't feel it is worth the cost in runes. This is good for those in a DPS role when fighting multiple targets. (If you have Subversion there should be no danger of you pulling threat when you are using this for DPS.)

Tanking: As you progress in levels (and content) using Death and Decay to control adds becomes more and more important – most notably in heroic dungeons and raids. As you near these levels you may want to consider taking Morbidity (Unholy) if you don't already have it in your build. The faster recycle of Death and Decay may be critical for keeping control. Paired with other AE abilities, such as Blood Boil or Howling Blast, you should be able to easily hold the attention of multiple opponents, allowing you to save your taunts for a rare emergency.

Note: Remember that this is cast and placed. You don't *have* to drop it right where you are standing. (I often do because threat isn't guaranteed just because a critter is within the effect radius.) It *can* be used in a strategic location that critters will run past/through as you pull other targets from a different area with Dark Command and/or Death Grip (or even ranged abilities such as Death Coil and/or Icy Touch, etc.) (Then join them all up back at the D&D drop.) Just be sure if you do use this tactic that others know not to pile on threat right away, as critters can easily come loose without additional threat built up (such as through Pestilence and/or Blood Boil.)



Death Coil

40 runic power

Fire a blast of unholy energy, causing x Shadow damage to an enemy target or healing y damage to a friendly Undead target.

I tend to only use Death Coil if I am full or near full on runic power, when all my runes are currently cycling, or when I am near the end of combat. This leaves your runic power available for Icebound Fortitude, Rune Strike, or other abilities. This has similar strategic uses as Icy Touch. Note that since Death Coil uses runic power, it is not rune based and thus is ideal for using between rune recycle periods. It often can't be used as an opener or early in combat due to lack of runic power.

Note that if you have Lichborne (Frost talent) Death Coil can be used to self-heal while Lichborne is active.



Death Grip

no cost, 35 second cooldown

Harness the unholy energy that surrounds and binds all matter, drawing the target towards the death knight and forcing the enemy to attack the death knight for 3 seconds.

This seems like an ability you just want to go crazy with but you actually want to save it for specific conditions due to its long recycle. Note that while the ability forces the target to fight you for three seconds it **does not** actually build up any threat on its own. It is best to follow up Death Grip with a direct attack or an AE ability to be sure you build up some threat.

Pull: It can be used to pull important targets towards you, such as casters or hunters who would otherwise stay at range, to pull targets away from a group (like to pull it back to you after it goes running after a caster or healer in your group), or to escape from AE damage (like if an engineer just dropped a bomb, pulling him towards you as you back away from the bomb allows meleeists the chance to move away from the AE blast). It can also be used during a pull in combination with Dark Command (taunt) so that you have the attention of two targets immediately after pull, though the three second duration makes this difficult to pull off successfully.

Off tanking: This is a good ability for off tanking as you can peel the target away from the main fight, getting it clear of the group in terms of any AE damage it may do, or to just be sure you have its attention and others won't accidentally get too much threat.

Note: Some targets will be immune to the 'yank' aspect, particularly as you get to higher level content. They can also be completely immune, or temporarily immune, such as during the casting of certain spells or abilities. Also, there seems to be a minimal distance from the target that you need to be in order for the ability to have a yank effect. It seems that if you are within melee range the ability won't move the target from their current position.



Death Strike

1 Frost, 1 Unholy

A deadly attack that deals 75% weapon damage plus x and heals the Death Knight for 5% of their maximum health for each of their diseases on the target.

Tanking/Survival: I recommend using Death Strike as soon as you notice that you are at about 60% hit points (or lower), or if your healer is out of mana, dead, or AFK. (Personally I use it as part of my main attack rotation, both for damage as well as to generate death runes.) Keeping yourself more full on HP reduces your dependence on healing from your group mates and reserves heals for when you are taking greater amounts of damage, closer to death, or to be used on those in the group who can't otherwise self-heal. Paired with a few points of Death Rune Mastery (Blood talent) you should be able to generate enough death runes to not have to worry about the dual rune cost putting you short on available runes. Note that some would disagree and say to ignore Death Strike completely, leaving healing to your group healer(s) in favor of doing a more damaging move. (Personally I find that with a blood build this easily becomes one of your most damaging moves with the proper talents backing it.)

Note too that the amount you are healed acts as an indirect threat generator.



Empower Rune Weapon

no cost, 5 minute cooldown

Empower your rune weapon, immediately activating (readying) all your runes and generating 25 runic power.

Survival/DPS: This ability is an incredibly powerful ability, as it resets all of your runes and adds 25 runic power. This is best saved for situations when you need to activate several defensive moves or when you really need to bust out the damage. Note that it has a fairly long recycle timer (5 minutes) and that it will still take you time to use the abilities which are now ready. If you only have a few runes down it may be best to wait the few seconds for them to recycle or consider using Blood Tap if you only need one (Death Rune) ready.



Horn of Winter

no cost, generates 10 runic power, 20 second cooldown

The Death Knight blows the Horn of Winter, which generates 10 runic power and increases the total Strength and Agility of all party

or raid members within 30 yards by x. Lasts 2 minutes.

Buff: As a buff you want this up as much as possible. I try to remember to refresh it after every fight.



Icebound Fortitude

20 runic power, 2 minute cooldown

The Death Knight freezes their blood to become immune to Stun effects and reduce all damage taken by 20% plus additional damage reduction based on Defense for 12 seconds.

Damage reduction/Tanking/Survival: This is a decent tanking ability, however, due to a longer recycle timer you may want to save it for times you need extra protection. If you are just questing it cycles quickly enough to be used about every other fight.

Note that during raids or dungeon instances it is often best reserved for specific use, such as defense against a boss that has a special move such as Enrage or Berserk.



Icy Touch

1 Frost

Chills the target for x to y Frost damage and infects them with Frost Fever, a disease that deals periodic damage and reduces melee and ranged attack speed by 14% for 15 seconds.

Debuff/DOT: This will debuff targets, so I recommend refreshing it whenever it is getting close to running out. If you are a tank you may want to consider taking Improved Icy Touch for the increased debuff. This also places the Frost Fever DOT on the target. Note that the DOTs caused by moves often add up to a significant portion of our damage.

Runners: This is a great ability for finishing off runners, as the ability has a fast recycle time.

Pull: I use Icy Touch to pull rather than Death Grip in almost every case. It does damage, debuffs, and generates threat all at once. It also generates a little bit of runic power to start the fight with. Plus, due to the much faster recycle time compared to Death Grip, this allows you to keep Death Grip in reserve should you need it later in the fight.

Spell interrupt: I am not sure if this actually has a spell interruption built in, but it seems like it does have a small chance to interrupt spell casting.



Pestilence

1 Blood

Spreads existing Blood Plague and Frost Fever infections from your target to all other enemies within 10 yards.

PBAE DPS: It is important to note that the damage ticks from your diseases do a significant amount of damage. When fighting multiple opponents it would be wise to keep diseases running on as many targets as possible. I find it best to spread disease to groups via Pestilence right after you have refreshed them on your current target.



Raise Dead

no cost, 3 minute cooldown

Raises a Ghoul to fight by your side. If no humanoid corpse that yields experience or honor is available, you must supply Corpse Dust to complete the spell. You can have a maximum of one Ghoul at a time. Lasts 1 minute.

DPS/Control/Survival: "Numbers for numbers". The uncontrolled ghoul tends to be pretty dumb and not something you want on the battlefield as it can often attack the wrong target, it can taunt targets to face the wrong direction, or may charge forward keeping targets in places you don't want them to be. However, the term "numbers for numbers" is a great tip to remember. If you will be fighting a high number of targets and/or you won't be able to control or know which is hitting whom (chaos often ensues in such large battles) summoning your ghoul for the fight can be a great benefit to the group. (Basically plan on it being dumb and use it as a distraction.)

As example, say there are 8 targets and 5 players. If two of those players are Death Knight, and they both raise their ghoul, the numbers are now 8 to 7. This means it is far less likely for multiple targets to focus on a single player increasing the likelihood that casters will not be distracted, nor get the attention of too many at once. Also, if you use Ice Chains and nothing else, this will often result in the ghoul charging and attacking the target, which can be used in a 'push one / pull one' situation as the ghoul will solo the creature at range often keeping it taunted in place.

I've heard that those who take Master of Ghouls often reference that their ghouls do a fair bit of damage, so someone building into Unholy may want to consider this. Also remember that the Master of Ghoul talent changes your pet to one which is controllable, which makes it a much more effective companion.



Strangulate

1 Blood, 2 minute cooldown

Strangulates an enemy, silencing them for 5 seconds.

Silence and Taunt: Obviously the primary use for Strangulate is the silence effect. However, by silencing a caster this has an added effect of being a taunt as well as causing the caster to close to melee range. This is critical during dungeon fights, as a ranged opponent tends to stay at range, keeping that buffer zone between themselves and your group which can easily result in unwanted adds to your fight or missed AE abilities because they aren't close enough to be hit.



Army Of The Dead (level 80)

1 Blood, 1 Frost, 1 Unholy, 10 minute cooldown

Summons an entire legion of Ghouls to fight for the Death Knight. The Ghouls will swarm the area, taunting and fighting anything they can.

AE Taunt/DPS crazyness: While Army of the Dead has an extremely long recycle it can be very useful in situations where you don't need control over a target. It can be great to use as 'scatter distraction' against a single or multiple opponents when you don't want it/them focused on particular group members. While great as a panic move this is much better used strategically due to the 5 or so second summoning time (it's a channeled ability).

Note for Tanks

There are three abilities (one in each talent line) that are considered critical for tanks. They are; Blade Barrier (Blood), Toughness (Frost), and Anticipation (Unholy). When working on a tanking build, always be mindful that is 15 points that should be reserved.



I would actually recommend you also consider Improved Icy Touch (Frost) as this is a great debuff which has a greater effect with more important targets. Also, as you progress in levels and near heroic dungeons and raids I would add that Morbidity



(Unholy) should also be considered. Controlling adds becomes more and more critical the further you go and the faster recycle rate will help this. Even if you aren't the main tank, you are off-tanking, or even doing DPS at the time, this will help to keep threat off of those softer bodied companions which can't be hit for as long as we can. Depending on your attack rotation you may also want to consider Epidemic (Unholy) in order to increase your disease damage during multiple target fights, as disease ticks can add up to a pretty solid amount of damage (and cause indirect threat generation because of it.)

Talent abilities – Blood Regeneration



Abomination's Might

+1% Strength / +2% Strength
Increase attack power by 5% / 10%

DPS: This seems like a decent ability, particularly since it affects everyone within your group/raid.



Blade Barrier

When Blood Runes are on cooldown you gain the Blade Barrier effect, which decreases damage taken by 1%/2%/3%/4%/5% for the next 10 seconds.

Damage mitigation/Tanking/Survival: A must for pretty much any tanking Death Knight. Note that your blood runes only need to be down for a fraction of a second in order for this ability to go off, so it is effectively up all the time if you cycle blood abilities. Also note that this ability must be active in order to receive the damage mitigation. While it seems somewhat weak compared to other mitigation talents capping at 5%, that is 5% more mitigation than you would otherwise have.



Bladed Armor

Increases your attack power by 1/2/3/4/5 for every 180 armor value you have.

DPS: This is a decent talent, but it's effect will vary depending how many points you put into it as well as increasing as your armor value increases. If you have the points to spend it would be worth it, but if you can only afford to spend a few points you may want to look elsewhere. Note that this is a good talent to dump 5 points into in order to reach the next talent bracket.



Blood Gorged

When you are above 75% health you deal 2%/4%/6%/8%/10% more damage. In addition, your attacks ignore up to 2%/4%/6%/8%/10% of your opponent's armor at all times.

DPS: This generates additional damage through armor penetration and additional damage if you stay above 75% HP. This is a great choice for DPS or an off tank, as you'd rarely be below 75%. Blizzard has implied that armor penetration can be very helpful, but it is one of those abilities that has diminishing returns, so don't overly focus on just that one statistic. Note that armor penetration is only important for physically based damage, which Blood excels in. While this talent is too deep for other lines to consider it may impact the way you focus your build via things like gems, as more armor penetration is good for Blood, but not so good for other builds which may be more magically (damage) based.

Note that this talent will likely change due to 4.0 changes.



Bloody Strikes

Increases the damage of Bloody Strike by 5%/10%/15%, Heart Strike by 15%/30%/45%, and increases the damage of Blood Boil by 10%/20%/30%.

DPS: Who doesn't love more damage? This boosts a few of your blood based abilities. I recommend this to anyone who is primarily a blood build.



Blood Worms

Your weapon hits have a 3%/6%/9% chance to cause the target to spawn 2-4 Bloodworms. Bloodworms attack your enemies, healing you as they do damage for 20 seconds or until killed.

Survival/DPS: The primary function of blood worms is to heal. However, there is a small damage component. (I've heard a reference of 1%.) For someone looking for a heal and a minor damage boost Blood Worms may be a more attractive talent than Rune Tap. Note though that there are limitations, as the Blood Worms are based on a chance on hit and they can be killed.



Bloody Vengeance (builds on Dark Conviction)

Gives you a 1%/2%/3% bonus to physical damage you deal for 30 seconds after dealing a critical strike from a weapon swing, spell, or ability. This effect stacks up to 3 times.

DPS/Buff: Who doesn't love more damage? The only downside to Bloody Vengeance is that it requires getting a critical in order for the effect to trigger. With a 30 second duration stacking multiple times this won't be an issue if your critical rating is high enough. From what I've seen I've always gotten up to the max three buffs every fight.



Butchery

Whenever you kill an enemy that grants experience or honor you generate up to 10/20 runic power. In addition, you generate 1/2 runic power per 5 seconds while in combat.

I originally used this talent, but as time went on it seemed less and less necessary. The 'on kill' trigger doesn't really happen all that often, as you aren't really killing all that many creatures. Typically when you do kill something combat is over and your runic power will begin to drain down, making extra almost useless. Unless you are doing back-to-back kills an 'on kill' talent really isn't as helpful as it may sound. The usefulness is really limited to 'trash pulls' during raids or during some fights in dungeons and its constant low-level runic power generation during combat. You won't really have more than a few extra targets to kill during important boss fights nor during general questing.



Dark Conviction (leads to Bloody Vengeance)

Increases your chance to critically hit with weapons, spells and abilities by 1%/2%/3%/4%/5%

Burst damage: This increases your chance to crit with everything you do. In my opinion this is one of those abilities that is a must for all Death Knight players regardless of build. If you have the points to spend I highly recommend spending them here. The only possible reason not to take it would be if you were already near a point where critical rating has diminishing returns.



Dancing Rune Weapon

60 runic power, 1.5 minute cooldown

Summons a second rune weapon that fights on its own for 12 seconds, doing the same attacks as the Death Knight but for 50% reduced damage.

DPS: This is a good ability for increasing your DPS for a short while. If you have multiple runes available this is an ideal time to activate Dancing Rune Weapon as you can then follow it with spamming some massive damage. The downside to this ability is that it has a long recycle timer and it costs a fair bit of runic power. Also note that even though the ability may be ready for use you may not be able to activate it if you don't have enough runic power. Be mindful that the weapon has the same limitations as you, so if you are stunned or tossed out of range the weapon may be idle and do no damage.

I have mixed feelings about the ability as there have been times when I've been able to use Hysteria, then Dancing Rune Weapon, and followed it up with six or more Heart Strikes right in a row, while there have also been times I've activated Dancing Rune Weapon and been bounced out of range or stunned and the weapon did absolutely nothing. It is only one point, so for a one point talent it's probably worth taking compared to the risk of failure.

(As a side note I'm personally preying that someday Blizzard will change the ability to become a passive ability which lets us wield a two-handed weapon and one-handed at the same time (something similar to Titan's Grip for Warriors) as I feel these tricks make the talent too unpredictable in terms of usefulness.)



Death Rune Mastery

Whenever you hit with Death Strike or Obliterate there is a 33%/66%/100% chance that the Frost and Unholy Runes will become Death Runes when they activate.

This can be a really helpful talent to have. The only reason I could see for spending all three points to get a 100% chance for Death Runes would be if you enjoy the flexibility of Death Runes. If you need to shave a single point off of somewhere, dropping down to 66% chance will likely do you just fine if you don't require those Death Runes to always be there.



Heart Strike

1 Blood

Instantly strike the target and his nearest ally, causing 50% weapon damage plus x on the primary target, and 25% weapon damage plus y on the secondary target. Each target takes 10% additional damage for each of your diseases active on that target.

AEish DPS: This is a must for any deep Blood build. Heart Strike should be used in place of Blood Strike since Blood Strike does not cause a disease and they share the same recycle timer. Heart Strike will be where most of your damage comes from. Plus, this ability strikes two targets and is the only Blood talent based ability that does AE. (Even though that “area effect” is only a single additional target *if* they happen to be within melee range.)

You can also take Glyph of Heart strike (reduces movement speed of the target) for a nice boost to control the targets you are fighting. Note though that many bosses are immune to the effects of Glyph of Heart Strike negating this effect as you get higher in level. Most raid level creatures and pretty much all raid level bosses will be immune to any movement altering abilities.



Hysteria

no cost, 3 minute cooldown

Induces a friendly unit into a killing frenzy for 30 seconds. The target is Enraged, which increases their physical damage dealt by 20%, but that causes them to lose health equal to 1% of their maximum health every second.

DPS Buff: Hysteria can be a good damage boost for a player or pet that is off tanking. Those who are not the focus of damage don't need as much healing. The health loss becomes a moot point if you have plenty of health. Hysteria can be a lot of fun used on yourself, as you can often negate the health loss with Death Strikes and/or Rune Taps. (Or obviously simply having enough heals being applied to you.)

Note that since damage indirectly affects threat this could be useful to use on yourself when you are tanking, but be cautious to calculate how much extra healing this will take. The fact that Hysteria must be activated, has a health reduction, and a long recycle, balance out the fact that you are getting a sizeable boost and that it can be used on others. If you want straight up damage just for yourself other talents may be a better choice. If, however, you have a free point to spend it's a point well worth considering.



Improved Blood Presence

While in Frost Presence or Unholy Presence, you retain 2%/4% healing from Blood Presence, and healing done to you is increased by 5%/10% in Blood Presence.

Tanking/Survival: This talent is of questionable value. On the one hand you are getting free healing anytime you are doing damage in any presence, on the other hand if you are grouped any heal over time would likely have a similar or greater effect. The advantage would be that Improved Blood Presence can't be dispelled and the minor heal may have additional threat generation.



Improved Death Strike

Increases the damage of your Death Strike by 15%/30%, increases its critical strike chance by 3%/6%, and increases the healing granted by 25%/50%.

DPS/Burst damage: This is worth considering if you are someone who uses Death Strike. Self healing is part of what the Blood talents are about, so being able to increase damage on a healing ability is a nice boost.

Note that if you have a healer with you the healing aspect becomes fairly superficial. However, this does have its own recycle timer and as such can be used independently of other abilities.



Mark of Blood

1 Blood, 3 minute cooldown

Place a Mark of Blood on an enemy. Whenever the marked enemy deals damage to a target, that target is healed for 4% of its maximum health. Lasts for 20 seconds or up to 20 hits.

Debuff: This is a bit of an odd talent for Death Knights. Instead of causing a direct reduction of damage it causes a heal after damage has been done. Some say this talent is worthwhile, but due to the very long recycle and short duration I wonder if it is really worth it. It should be noted that while the ability references a 4% heal on the target that heal does have a fixed cap, so it may or may not do the full 4%

return. While it is only one talent point, I feel there are many other talents worth considering before this one. Also note that you have no control of who gets healed.



Might of Mograine

Increases the critical strike damage bonus of your Blood Boil, Blood Strike, Death Strike, and Heart Strike abilities by 15%/30%/45%.

Burst damage: This will increase your burst damage done by the criticals of many of your attacks. This is also good for tanking as damage indirectly increases threat.



Rune Tap and Improved Rune Tap

Rune Tap: 1 Blood, 1 minute cooldown; Converts 1 Blood Rune into 10% of your maximum health.

Improved Rune Tap: Increases the health provided by Rune Tap by 33%/66%/100% and lowers its cooldown by 10/20/30 seconds.

Tanking/Survival: I really like the ability to self heal. Being able to use Rune Tap and generate up to 20% of my total hit points (when you max Improved Rune Tap) is really helpful. You get even more if Vampiric Blood is currently active. If you take Glyph of Rune Tap the ability is further boosted and becomes a minor group heal.

Note that those who feel healing should be left to the group healer would disagree with me, but I feel self healing is part of what the Blood tree is about. And if the healer is out of mana, out of range, or otherwise unable to heal you Rune Tap can save lives.

Note that since Rune Tap is an instant ability and it can not be interrupted (accept maybe by stun). It does, however, count as a spell, so it can be prevented from being cast.



Scent of Blood

You have a 15% chance after dodging, parrying or taking direct damage to gain the Scent of Blood effect, causing your next 1/2/3 melee hit(s) to generate 10 runic power.

Burst damage: This is great for building runic power. Note that this talent is better for someone who is tanking, as those doing DPS shouldn't be the focus of damage, thus they would have a reduced number of chances to dodge, parry, or take damage (what the talent requires in order to proc). With the rune power boost you can fire off more of your rune power based abilities more often.



Spell Deflection

You have a chance equal to your Parry chance of taking 15%/30%/45% less damage from a direct damage spell.

Tanking/Survival: This is a bit of a tricky talent. It is based on a *chance* to go off, which means it won't always happen, and it references that it *only* works for direct damage spells, meaning those AE based abilities, such as breath weapons, stomps, etc., *may* not be blocked by this ability. While this may be great for PvP I question its usefulness for PvE since so many NPC abilities might ignore this talent. (I have been told it *does* work for a surprising number of AE type abilities, but I don't know what the official word from Blizzard is.)



Subversion

Increases the critical chance of Blood Strike, Scourge Strike, Heart Strike and Obliterate 3%/6%/9% and reduces threat generated while in Blood or Unholy Presence by 8%/16%/25%.

Burst damage: This is a great ability for critical chance boost, however, it also reduces threat generation in Blood or Unholy presence. As a DPS or off tank this is a big bonus, but as a tank who wants to keep the attention of the critters you are fighting this may be problematic as it forces you to stay in Frost presence – which you basically want to do if you are the tanking anyways.

I personally love this ability both for the critical chance boost and the ability to switch into Blood presence and do extra damage without worry of taking threat from someone else who needs to be the focus of a critter's attention.



Sudden Doom

Your Blood Strikes and Heart Strikes have a 5%/10%/15% chance to launch a free Death Coil at your target.

DPS: This seems like a very worthwhile talent if you have the points to spend. In my experience

the 15% chance really doesn't seem accurate. It seems to go off far less frequently than it should. Note that there are a few talents and glyphs which will boost the damage you do that do not require a proc chance.



Two-Handed Weapon Specialization

Increases the damage you deal with two-handed melee weapons by 2%/4%.

DPS: I recommend this for anyone who has the points to spend and uses two-handed weapons as their main weapon. While the effect sounds small, I have seen reference from theorycrafters that it is actually one of the higher damage boosting talents.



Vampiric Blood

1 Blood, 1 minute cooldown

Temporarily grants the Death Knight 15% of maximum health and increases the amount of health generated through spells and effects by 35% for 10 seconds. After the effect expires, the health is lost.

Tanking/Survival: While this is a worthy talent its long recycle means you will be saving it more often than you will be actually using it. The long recycle effectively limits it to boss fights and use when you are very familiar with the timing of the encounter, or as a panic move to use right before Rune Tap to keep yourself alive.

The combination of maxed Improved Rune Tap, Glyph of Rune tap, and Death Pact, can regain you nearly a full HP bar of health in a matter of seconds if you are under the effect of Vampiric Blood.



Vendetta

Heals you for up to 2%/4%/6% of your maximum health whenever you kill a target that yields experience or honor.

I originally used this talent, but as time went on it seemed less and less necessary. The 'on kill' trigger doesn't really happen all that often, as you aren't really killing all that many creatures. Typically when you do kill something combat is over and heals are easy. Unless you are doing back to back kills an 'on kill' talent really isn't as helpful as it may sound. The usefulness is really limited to 'trash pulls' during raids or during some fights in dungeons. You won't really have more than a few extra targets to kill during important boss fights nor during general questing.



Veteran of the Third War

Increases your total Strength by 2%/4%/6%, your Stamina by 1%/2%/3%, and your expertise by 2/4/6.

A great talent full of win. Strength boosts damage, parry chance, and indirectly increases threat. Stamina helps to keep you alive. Expertise reduces the chance your attacks will be parried or dodged. A good talent for any build.



Will of the Necropolis

Damage that would normally take you below 35% health or taken while you are at 35% health is reduced by 5%/10%/15%. This effect cannot occur more often than once every 15 seconds and cannot be triggered by damage which deals less than 5% of your health.

Damage mitigation/Tanking/Survival: Damage mitigation is always welcome for tanks.

Talent abilities – Frost

Mitigation, Howling Blast (massive AE)



Acclimation

When you are hit by a spell, you have a 10%/20%/30% chance to boost your resistance to that type of magic for 18 seconds. Stacks up to 3 times.

Tanking/Survival: A good talent for anyone who wants to gain magical defense. I wonder though just how much resistance you will get. I haven't had much experience with this talent.



Annihilation

Increases critical strike chance of your melee special abilities by 1%/2%/3%. In addition there is a 33%/66%/100% chance that your Obliterate will do its damage without consuming diseases.

DPS: This is a decent critical boosting ability. Note though, unlike Dark Conviction (Blood) which boosts your chance to critical with all abilities, Annihilation only increases the chance for melee based criticals. It does, however, also negate the loss of diseases when you use Obliterate.



Black Ice

Increases your Frost and Shadow damage by 2%/4%/6%/8%/10%.

DPS: This is a good boost for a Frost based build. It's also decent for Unholy as several abilities are shadow based. (Death Coil is also shadow damage based.) Black Ice is really only helpful to a heavy Frost build or someone who uses Death Coil a lot. Those who are primarily Blood or Unholy will not get nearly as much of a benefit due to only having one or a few attacks this talent would boost.



Blood of the North

Increases Blood Strike and Frost Strike damage by 3%/6%/10%. In addition, whenever you hit with Blood Strike or Pestilence there is a 30%/60%/100% chance that the Blood Rune will become a Death Rune when it activates.

DPS: This is a good damage boosting ability. There is also a chance that the runes used will become Death Runes. However, Frost really does just fine on its own without having Death runes.



Chilblains

Victims of your Frost Fever disease are Chilled, reducing movement speed by 15%/30%/50% for 10 seconds.

Control: While control abilities are nice, the reality is that the higher you go in progression the more often you will find critters that are immune to movement slowing abilities. I question if this talent is worth taking (for PvE).



Chill of the Grave

Your Chains of Ice, Howling Blast, Icy Touch and Obliterate generate 2.5/5 additional runic power.

DPS: While additional runic power generation is nice, I really don't think this is necessary; particularly considering how low of a boost (per talent point) you get compared to something like Scent of Blood (Blood).



Deathchill

no cost, 2 minute cooldown

When activated, makes your next Icy Touch, Howling Blast, Frost Strike or Obliterate a critical hit if used within 30 seconds.

DPS: This talent seems completely unnecessary if you take Killing Machine. The only possible reason I would see for taking this ability would be that the Killing Machine proc would often times not be there for an opening move (making this a better choice for PvP than PvE).



Endless Winter

2%/4% Strength.

A decent boost for Frost spec.



Frigid Dreadplate

Reduces the chance melee attacks will hit you by 1%/2%/3%.

Tanking/Survival: A good talent for anyone who tanks to consider. While this may reduce the chance for dodge or parry abilities to go off (such as Rune Strike), not being hit at all is always a big bonus for a tank.

Note that this talent only applies to melee attacks and due to its depth in the line it may be difficult for casual Frost builds to reach this talent.



Frost Strike

40 runic power

Instantly strike the enemy, causing 55% weapon damage plus 48 as Frost damage.

DPS: A great ability for anyone who proceeds deep enough into the Frost line. Its only possible disadvantage is that it is based on runic power, not (Frost) Runes, so the number of times you may be able to use it during combat may be limited and it will almost never be useable as an opening move.



Glacier Rot

Diseased enemies take 7%/13%/20% more damage from your Icy Touch, Howling Blast, and Frost Strike.

DPS: A great damage boosting ability for a Frost build.



Guile of Gorefiend

Increases the critical strike damage bonus of your Blood Strike, Frost Strike, Howling Blast and Obliterate abilities by 15%/30%/45% and increases the duration of your Icebound Fortitude by 2/4/6 seconds.

DPS/Tanking/Survival: One of the best abilities for a Frost build as this boosts the damage of your two primary abilities, as well as boosting the duration of Icebound Fortitude.



Howling Blast

1 Frost, 1 Unholy, 8 second cooldown

Blast the target with a frigid wind dealing x to y Frost damage to all enemies within 10 yards.

AE DPS: This is an incredibly useful ability for group fights as it damages ALL targets within the radius. I would say this is a must for any Frost build.

Note that damage also indirectly increases threat, a boost to any tanking Death Knight.

Note that this is a cast ability, and as such is ranged. This makes it one of the few abilities we have useable at range, particularly a ranged AE.



Hungering Cold

40 runic power, 1 minute cooldown

Purges the earth around the Death Knight of all heat. Enemies within 10 yards are trapped in ice, preventing them from performing any action for 10 seconds and infecting them with Frost Fever. Enemies are considered Frozen, but any damage other than diseases will break the ice.

AE hold: This is a decent ability to get quick control over a lot of critters. The effect won't last long though, only lasting 10 seconds, and any damage will break it. While groupmates will often break your hold (typically by spamming AE), it can often be good to give healers or others 1-2 seconds of time to react to what is happening.



Icy Reach

Increases the range of your Icy Touch, Chains of Ice, and Howling Blast by 5/10 yards.

DPS: This extends the reach of your Icy Touch. While this becomes irrelevant once something is within melee range this can be very helpful on pulls or when you are in battles (such as raids) where the targets may become spread out and that little bit of extra reach could allow you to hit them sooner than you otherwise would. I would love to take this with every build I do, but the truth is that most of the time you are in combat you are within melee range and just don't need that extra reach compared to spending the points on other talents.



Icy Talons (builds on Improved Icy Touch, leads to Improved Icy Talons)

You leech heat from victims of your Frost Fever, so that when their melee attack speed is reduced, yours is increased by 4%/8%/12%/16%/20% for the next 20 seconds.

DPS/Buffer: This is a good ability for those who are melee based. It is important to note, however, that this ability only affects your auto-attack speed. Your primary attacks are based on rune recycle time, which Icy Talons will not affect. That being said, if you consider the average attack speed of a two-handed weapon at around 3.5 seconds, spending just 3 points (of 5) in Icy Talons will give you nearly 1 extra attack during its 20 second duration. At 5 points you gain nearly 1.5 attacks during the duration. Also note that you gain this buff when you use your Icy Touch spell. The debuff from Icy Touch will wear off long before the 20 second buff from Icy Talons, so you will effectively always have the Icy Talon buff as long as you are in combat.

Note that at this time this haste only affects your auto attack, but it has been implied that when 4.0 is released haste will also affect Rune recycle timers.



Improved Frost Presence

While in Blood Presence or Unholy Presence you retain 3%/6% Stamina from Frost Presence, and damage done to you is decreased an additional 1%/2% in Frost Presence.

Damage mitigation/Tanking/Survival: There is no reason to take this talent unless you are a tank. If you are, this is one of the better tanking abilities as it increases your damage mitigation.



Improved Icy Talons (builds on Icy Talons)

Your Icy Talons effect increases the melee haste of your group or raid by 20% for the next 20 seconds. In addition, increases your haste by 5% at all times.

DPS/Buffer: There is much debate if this is a useful talent for Death Knight, as this only affects auto-attack speed. Your main abilities are based on rune recycle time, which does not benefit by the haste given by this talent. However, if you are using dual wield, particularly if you have Nerves of Cold Steel (Frost) and/or Blood-Caked Blade (Unholy), this would be a benefit as there is a synergy between those talents.

Note that while its effect is questionable for Death Knight the +20% buff to your group is extremely beneficial to other meleeists.



Improved Icy Touch (leads to Icy Talons)

Your Icy Touch does an additional 5%/10%/15% damage and your Frost Fever reduces melee and ranged attack speed by an additional 2%/4%/6%.

DPS/Debuff: I believe this is a good ability as you gain two benefits. First, you gain a boost to one of your primary ranged attacks. Second, it generates an additional boost to a debuff on your target. I believe this is an ability well worth considering for anyone who wants to spend points in the Frost line, particularly a tank.



Killing Machine

Your melee attacks have a chance to make your next Icy Touch, Howling Blast, or Frost Strike a critical strike. (5 ranks)

Burst damage: This is an ability well worth considering for someone who has multiple frost based attacks. However, I recommend against Killing Machine if you are only spending a few points in the frost line since you would only have one ability that it affects.



Lichborne

no cost, 2 minute cooldown

Draw upon unholy energy to become undead for 10 seconds. While undead, you are immune to Charm, Fear, and Sleep effects.

Survival: I find Lichborne to have too short of a duration to be useful in most fights. It's really just a panic move. Also, be mindful of the vulnerability it causes to specific damage types. I tended to hold it in reserve almost all the time when I had the talent. It seems to have very limited usefulness for PvE (such as when a Succubus is summoned), but many mention it is quite useful for PvP.



Merciless Combat

Your Icy Touch, Howling Blast, Obliterate and Frost Strike do an additional 6%/12% damage when striking targets with less than 35% health.

DPS: This seems like it could be a decent damage boost. However, I think it would only really be useful against elites, as the quest critters tend to die far too quickly to matter.



Nerves of Cold Steel

Increases your chance to hit with one-handed melee weapons by 1%/2%/3% and increases the damage done by your offhand weapon by 8%/16%/25%.

DPS: A very important ability for dual wielding. The hit% boost negates the dual wield penalty and the additional damage is a nice gain.

Note that since nearly every ability a Death Knight has is x% of main hand damage, you need to take this talent and Threat of Thassarian to match two-handed damage.



Rime

Increases the critical strike chance of your Icy Touch and Obliterate by 5%/10%/15% and casting Obliterate has a 5%/10%/15% chance to reset the cooldown on Howling Blast and cause your next Howling Blast to consume no runes.

DPS: This is a good ability for boosting the damage caused by Howling Blast as it can reset the timer and allow you a free cast. The talent also has a critical chance boost to Icy Touch and Obliterate which can also be nice.



Runic Power Mastery

Increases your maximum Runic Power by 15/30.

While the potential for more runic power is always good to have if you can cycle abilities quick enough to never be full, you don't really *need* more potential runic power. Abilities that use runic power tend to use 40 points (40% of your total base pool), so more isn't necessary for these abilities. If the ability had a runic power generation component build in to the talent I would highly recommend it, but I question its usefulness if it just increases your pool.



Threat of Thassarian

When dual-wielding, your Death Strikes, Obliterate, Plague Strikes, Rune Strikes, Blood Strikes, and Frost Strikes have a 30%/60%/100% chance to also deal damage with your offhand weapon.

DPS: This is a critical ability for those wishing to dual wield.

Note though that dual wield damage may still fall behind two-handed, as this talent does not affect Rune Strike damage.



Toughness

Increases your armor value from items by 2%/4%/6%/8%/10% and reduces the duration of all movement slowing effects by 6%/12%/18%/24%/30%.

Damage mitigation/Tanking/Survival: Who doesn't love more armor? This is one of those talents I feel all tanking Death Knights should take.



Tundra Stalker

Your spells and abilities deal 3%/6%/9%/12%/15% more damage to targets infected with Frost Fever. Also increases your expertise by 1/2/3/4/5.

DPS: This is a decent ability to increase damage as well as giving you some Expertise.



Unbreakable Armor

1 Frost, 1 min cooldown

Reinforces your armor with a thick coat of ice, increasing your armor by 25% and increasing your Strength by 20% for 20 seconds.

Damage mitigation/Tanking/Survival/DPS: This is a great damage mitigation and buff that all tanks should take. Even those who are DPS may want to consider it for a panic move similar to a "berserk". It's a shame this ability is so deep in the Frost line as it is a great ability for all tanks. Being this deep means those who aren't heavily investing into Frost won't be able to reach it.

Talent abilities – Unholy Ghoul as a controllable pet, Anti-magic



Anti-Magic Zone (builds on Magic Suppression)

1 Unholy, 2 minute cooldown

Places a large, stationary Anti-Magic Zone that reduces all spell damage done to party or raid members inside it by 75%. The Anti-Magic Zone lasts for 10 seconds or until it absorbs xspell damage.

Damage mitigation/Tanking/Survival: This is a great ability for fighting critters who do a lot of magical damage. Unfortunately the opportunity to use this doesn't seem to present itself all that often. Coupled with the 2 minute cool down you will often times be holding the ability more often than using it. It seems like one of those abilities you just wind up holding onto in order to save it for boss fights, and even then only a few are heavy magic users. I'd certainly recommend this to anyone who is doing an Unholy build and wants to focus on defense, but I'm not sure anyone else would find it useful.



Anticipation

Increases your Dodge chance by 1%/2%/3%/4%/5%.

Tanking/Survival: Pretty much a must for any tanking Death Knight. Anyone who tanks will be fending off attacks, and any talent which can help with mitigation of damage is an ability worth considering taking.



Blood-Caked Blade

Your auto attacks have a 10%/20%/30% chance to cause a Blood-Caked Strike, which hits for 25% weapon damage plus 12.5% for each of your diseases on the target.

Burst damage: This is one of the few talents for Death Knight which are a benefit to those who are dual wielding. While your primary abilities will still do less damage (as they are based on x% of your main hand weapon damage and recycle on a fixed timer) the Blood-Caked Blade effect will have more chances to go off, as you are making twice as many attacks.



Bone Shield

1 Unholy, 1 minute cooldown

The Death Knight is surrounded by 4 whirling bones. While at least 1 bone remains he takes 20% less damage from all sources and deals 2% more damage with all attacks, spells, and abilities. Each damaging attack that lands consumes 1 bone. Lasts 1 minute.

Damage mitigation/Tanking/Survival/DPS: A must for anyone who does an Unholy build and is tanking. This is one of the better tanking abilities that Death Knights have. Combined with a high parry and dodge rate the benefits can last quite a while, particularly if you take the Glyph of Bone Shield.



Corpse Explosion

40 runic power, 5 second cooldown

Cause a corpse to explode for 166 Shadow damage to all enemies within 10 yards. Will use a nearby corpse if the target is not a corpse. Does not affect mechanical or elemental corpses.

AE Burst damage: This has the potential to be a fun ability since you can use your pet as a corpse if no useable corpses are around. Note that it doesn't work on all corpses and does seem to reference a pretty small effect radius. That being said it is a good AE ability to consider if you are taking Unholy as a secondary spec and need more AE abilities. Note though that it does run on runic power, not runes, so it's great to use during rune recycles, but it also may not be immediately available at the start of a combat (when you won't have corpses to use anyways.)



Crypt Fever (leads to Ebon Plaguebringer)

Your diseases also cause Crypt Fever, which increases disease damage taken by the target by 10%/20%/30%.

DPS: This is one of the few abilities that boost disease damage – well worth considering if you are one to stay on top of keeping your targets diseased.



Desecration

Your Plague Strikes and Scourge Strikes cause the Desecrated Ground effect. Targets in the area are slowed by 25%/50% by the

grasping arms of the dead while standing on the unholy ground. Lasts 12 seconds.

AE Control: This seems like a decent way to control groups, as it slows movement speed. I would recommend positioning yourself so this drops somewhere that the targets are forced to travel through, such as in a doorway or other choke point. This way the non-melee group members can stay at range, while the meleeists can stand on the desecrated ground and hold the line. Note that you only have indirect control of this as it triggers on a proc and it is automatically centered around where you are currently standing. Due to this indirect control its usefulness may be limited.

Note that many elite dungeon critters are immune to the effects of movement limiting abilities. This ability will likely be the most useful in non-raid situations, though there may be a few times during a raid where AE slows can be very helpful.



Desolation

Your Blood Strikes cause you to deal 1%/2%/3%/4%/5% additional damage with all attacks for the next 20 seconds.

DPS: This seems like a good damage boost. While a bit expensive, as the talent gives you +1% damage per 1 point spent, this seems like a decent damage boosting ability as it boosts all damage of all abilities.



Dirge

Your Death Strike, Plague Strike and Scourge Strike generate 2.5/5 additional runic power.

DPS: This is a decent ability for generating runic power if you use the abilities it procs off of.



Ebon Plaguebringer (builds on Crypt Fever)

Your Crypt Fever morphs into Ebon Plague, which increases magic damage taken by 4%/9%/13% in addition to increasing disease damage taken. Improves your critical strike chance with weapons and spells by 1%/2%/3% at all times.

DPS/Debuff: I believe this is one of the most useful group talents for Death Knight as this debuffs the target in a manner that benefits all the casters fighting the target. Anyone who is deep enough in the Unholy line should consider taking this to boost not only their own damage but also the damage of all casters in their group / raid.



Epidemic

Increases the duration of Blood Plague and Frost Fever by 3/6 seconds.

Indirect DPS: This is a decent ability, both as it frees up runes since you don't need to refresh diseases as quickly, and it helps you get deeper into the Unholy tree. Disease pulses do a fair bit of damage and a longer duration allows you do more pulses without needing to manually refresh the timers. However, if your attack rotation frequently refreshes diseases this would become unnecessary. Note that there is a sort of synergy with Morbidity as the longer duration (and not using runes to refresh those diseases) compensates for the faster recycle of Morbidity.



Ghoul Frenzy (built on by Master of Ghouls)

1 Unholy, 10 second cooldown

Grants your pet 25% haste for 30 seconds and heals it for 60% of its health over the duration.

DPS: Ghouls gone wild! A good boost for someone who is a pet user as this boosts both their damage and acts as a pet heal.



Improved Unholy Presence

While in Blood Presence or Frost Presence, you retain 8%/15% increased movement speed from Unholy Presence, and your runes finish their cooldowns 5%/10% faster in Unholy Presence.

DPS: The community feels that this ability is not worth taking unless you are going to be using Unholy presence. Faster movement speed really isn't all that useful.



Impurity

The attack power bonus of your spells is increased by 4%/8%/12%/16%/20%.

DPS: A good damage buff for someone who is spell based. It is important to note that our spells

are boosted by attack power, not spell power as other magic users are.



Magic Suppression (leads to Anti-Magic Zone)

You take 2%/4%/6% less damage from all magic. In addition, your Anti-Magic Shell absorbs an additional 25% of spell damage.

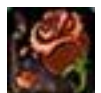
Tanking/Survival: This is a great ability for fighting critters who do a lot of magical damage. I'd recommend this to anyone who is doing an Unholy build and wants to focus on defense.



Master of Ghouls (built on by Night of the Dead, leads to Ghoul Frenzy)

Reduces the cooldown on Raise Dead by 60 seconds and the Ghoul summoned by your Raise Dead spell is considered a pet under your control. Unlike normal Death Knight Ghouls, your pet does not have a limited duration.

DPS/Pet: This allows you to control your Ghoul as you would any normal pet. (It also now lasts until its dead instead of having a summoned duration.) I've heard reference that this can contribute quite a bit to your total DPS. Do note though that while you can change your weapon to increase your personal damage the Ghoul's damage is based off of your total Strength so it isn't as easily boosted. Also note that the ghoul counts as a "corpse" if you want to use it as a bomb by triggering Corpse Explosion while targeting your pet.



Morbidity

Increases the damage and healing of Death Coil by 5%/10%/15% and reduces the cooldown on Death and Decay by 5/10/15 seconds.

AE Taunt/AE DPS: This is a good ability that boosts both damage and threat generation. This should be an easy choice for anyone looking to gain a bit more AE damage or looking for AE threat generation. Note that this also helps with DPS as it boosts your Death Coil damage.

I would say that as you progress in levels as a tank this talent becomes more and more critical for group threat generation. In heroic dungeons and raids this will be a helpful ability to have. For those who are DPS, taking Subversion (Blood) easily compensates for the additional threat.



Necrosis

Your auto attacks deal an additional 4%/8%/12%/16%/20% Shadow damage.

DPS: This is a great damage boosting ability in the Unholy line. I recommend it for anyone considering a DPS role (of any talent spec), particularly if you are going to dual wield as the boost affects both hands. This is one of the few talents which aid both dual wield and two handed fighting styles.



Night of the Dead (leads to Master of Ghouls)

Reduces the cooldown on Raise Dead by 45/90 seconds and the cooldown on Army of the Dead by 5/10 minutes. Also reduces the damage your pet takes from area of effect attacks by 40%/70%.

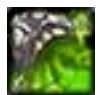
DPS: This is a good boost for pet based damage. Also, this is required in order to have your ghoul controllable as an actual pet.



On a Pale Horse

You become as hard to stop as death itself. The duration of all Stun and Fear effects used against you is reduced by 10%/20%, and your mounted speed is increased by 10%/20%. This does not stack with other movement speed increasing effects.

Survival: This is a nice reduction to stun and fear effects, but they really aren't used against you all that often in PvE. This may have a greater benefit for PvP players. The added movement speed is great while you are questing and leveling up, but beyond that you really won't use it.



Outbreak

Increases the damage of Plague Strike by 10%/20%/30% and Scourge Strike by 7%/13%/20%.

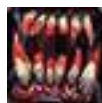
DPS: This would be a great DPS boost for someone who is an Unholy build. Note though that if you don't take Scourge Strike the talent likely is not worth the points since it would then only affect one ability.



Rage of Rivendare

Your spells and abilities deal 2%/4%/6%/8%/10% more damage to targets infected with Blood Plague. Also increases your expertise by 1/2/3/4/5.

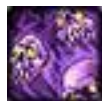
DPS: This is a fair DPS boost and a good source of Expertise. I would, however, recommend against dumping points specifically to get this deep in the line. It's possible that earlier talents in other lines may be useful since the DPS boost requires an active disease and Expertise can be gained in other ways.



Ravenous Dead

Increases your total Strength by 1%/2%/3% and the contribution your Ghouls get from your Strength and Stamina by 20%/40%/60%.

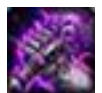
DPS: This talent boosts your Strength and the Strength and Stamina of your Ghoul. Great for someone who uses their ghoul, and good if you are just using it for yourself.



Reaping

Whenever you hit with Blood Strike or Pestilence there is a 33%/66%/100% chance that the Blood Rune becomes a Death Rune when it activates (readies).

DPS: This talent may be useful for some, but in my (limited) experience with Unholy it is completely unnecessary. I never had any problem being short on runes. It seemed that the rune use of Unholy was balanced in that it was never short on any particular type and as such did not need Death runes.

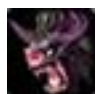


Scourge Strike

1 Frost, 1 Unholy

An unholy strike that deals 70% of weapon damage plus x, total damage increased 12% per each of your diseases on the target as Shadow damage.

DPS: This is a high damaging ability. Note that you don't want to ignore Plague Strike as it causes a disease, while Scourge Strike is pure damage. Also note that this takes two runes, so it is somewhat expensive for the damage it does.



Summon Gargoyle

60 runic power, 3 minute cooldown

A Gargoyle flies into the area and bombards the target with Nature damage modified by the Death Knight's attack power. Persists for 30 seconds.

AE DPS: I don't have much experience with this talent and I believe the feelings about it in the community are mixed. While it is only one point note that it has an enormously long recycle and short duration and as such its usefulness will be limited.



Unholy Blight

Causes the victims of your Death Coil to be surrounded by a vile swarm of unholy insects, taking 10% of the damage done by the Death Coil over 10 seconds.

Prevents diseases from being dispelled.

DPS: This adds on a DOT effect to your Death Coil. It seems like it could be an ok boost since it is only a single point, but I'm concerned that the dot is over a period of 10 seconds, which is a fairly long period of time considering you could toss multiple Death Coils within that time provided you had the runic power. For a single point it likely isn't bad if you need to get deeper into the Unholy tree, but there may be other talents out there more worthy of that investment.



Unholy Command

Reduces the cooldown of your Death Grip ability by 5/10 seconds.

Tanking/Survival: This could be a good talent, but I never find myself wishing that my Death Grip timer would refresh faster. While it would be nice to have two actual taunts, I really question the usefulness of this talent as I simply don't ever find the need for a faster cycle rate.



Vicious Strikes

Increases critical strike chance by 3%/6% and critical strike damage bonus by 15%/30% of your Plague Strike and Scourge Strike.

DPS: A good DPS boost for an Unholy build. Note that this talent is likely not worth it unless you are going to be taking Scourge Strike.



Virulence

Increases your chance to hit with your spells by 1%/2%/3% and reduces the chance that your damage over time diseases can be cured by 10%/20%/30%.

DPS: This is a good DPS based ability to consider in order to get deeper into the Unholy line. I question the value of the talent just judged on its own. The 1% boost to hit per rank just doesn't seem like a big deal. While the increased difficulty for diseases to be dispelled is nice, I wonder how often that situation will actually come up.

I recommend the ability for DPS builds who want to spend more points to get deeper in the line, but I question the usefulness of the talent if you aren't looking to go deeper or don't need to spend more points.



Wandering Plague

When your diseases damage an enemy, there is a chance equal to your melee critical strike chance that they will cause 33%/66%/100% additional damage to the target and all enemies within 8 yards. Ignores any target under the effect of a spell that is cancelled by taking damage.

AE DPS: This seems like a great way to boost your disease based damage, particularly if you keep all the enemies tagged by use of Pestilence.

Glyphs

Anti-Magic Shell

A decent boost for an Unholy Anti-Magic based tank.

Blood Strike

A decent damage boost if your target is snared. In PvE this is very unlikely to happen, as you really won't be using your Chains of Ice much outside of PvP. Plus, if you take Blood far enough your main attack will be Heart Strike, which shares a timer with Blood Strike and thus replaces it. This might be one of those abilities which are far more useful in PvP.

Bone Shield (Unholy)

A must for any tanking Unholy death knight.

Chains of Ice

This might be nice for a damage boost in PvP, but I see no reason at all to use it for PvE since Chains of Ice is so rarely used.

Dancing Rune Weapon (Blood)

A good damage boost for Dancing Rune Weapon. I would recommend this for a DPS build. The extra 5 seconds should allow for 1 or 2 extra attacks. Although very tempting for a Blood based tanking build, there may be better defensive glyphs to consider first.

Dark Command

A good boost for a tanking death knight. When you need to taunt you want to be sure it works, this will help. When asking others it seems this becomes less important as you near the hit cap, so this may be more helpful when you don't have raid tier gear, but it may be unnecessary once you start collecting higher tier items allowing you to choose a different glyph which may improve your DPS and thereby indirectly increase threat.

Dark Death

A decent boost for anyone looking to increase DPS, particularly if you have Sudden Doom (Blood) or Morbidity (Unholy).

Death and Decay

A decent damage and indirect threat boost. I don't know if I would recommend this for a tanking build, as there are a few other glyphs that may be better in terms of defense.

Death Grip

Personally I don't see this as necessary, as you really don't use Death Grip all that often. I find I only use it on very very rare occasion. (I'd say less often than once every 5 minutes.)

Death Strike

A decent damage boost for any build.

Frost Strike (Frost)

I just don't see this as helpful compared to other glyphs. Yes, it will reduce the Runic power cost by 20%, but I think there may be other glyphs that you will find more useful for your build (such as Howling Blast or Unbreakable Armor). However, if you have a Frost based DPS build it may be one worth considering.

Heart Strike (Blood)

A great boost for a lot of PvE encounters and an excellent boost for PvE. Note though that this will only affect the target and the secondary target which Heart Strike hits. It is also important to note that most bosses are immune to snare type abilities, as well as a few non-boss types, so its usefulness is somewhat limited in PvE particularly as you progress into raids.

Howling Blast (Frost)

An excellent boost for a Frost build. While it doesn't sound all that great, remember that Howling Blast is an AE ability that is not limited in number of targets. This will affect all the targets around you and since it adds a disease the next time you use it the damage will be boosted by that much more.

Hungering Cold (Frost)

An amazing glyph for someone who is using Hungering Cold as a control ability as this reduces the cost to zero. This might be a good one for PvP and certainly one to consider for PvE if you find yourself using it often. Note though, as with all abilities of this type, there are diminishing returns and you won't be able to just spam it. The targets will only be affected a few times before it has no effect.

Icebound Fortitude

I can see this being a good glyph to start out with, but I don't see it being necessary as you get higher in levels. As you get higher and your gear gets better you'll get less and less bonus, and it is possible you will eventually not get any bonus at all.

Icy Touch

Additional damage to your Frost based DOT can be a good boost. There may, however, be more important glyphs to consider.

Rune Strike

A great way to boost damage on an ability you use a lot, as well as increasing threat.

Rune Tap (Blood)

A great way to allow yourself to be a backup healer in groups. While you won't do a lot of healing that 10% you now do to your group may just keep you alive in a pinch. It is very important to note that this is an instant heal which can't be interrupted (accept I think by stun) and can be used any time it is ready. In situations where the healer would not otherwise be able to heal your heal may be the one that keeps someone alive.

Strangulate

While I'd love to silence more often in PvE I don't really know that it's necessary. It is used pretty infrequently. This might be one of those glyphs which are much more beneficial to those who PvP.

(the) Ghoul

While anyone can take this glyph I really only recommend it for those who are doing an Unholy build and who take Master of Ghouls. When the pet has a timed duration it just tends to die far too quickly to be worthy of a glyph to boost it.

Unbreakable Armor (Frost)

An excellent choice for a Frost tank build.

Vampiric Blood (Blood)

While this seems like a decent boost I don't know that it is really necessary. Yes, it's a good boost for Vampiric Blood, but I think there may be other more important glyphs to consider.

Theorycrafting

Theorycrafting has been left for last, as there is some debate on the topic. I also think that a player should focus on it last, particularly since equipment will constantly change as you go up in levels. In my opinion it is more important that a player choose a talent build and play style **that they enjoy** before worrying about tweaking the very small numbers. As always, I recommend **you find the play style that fits you** and increase stats accordingly.

The short version of theorycrafting is that those who wish to tank will want to focus on Defense (until the cap), then try to increase Stamina (I've heard you want over 30k HP). After that Dodge and Parry to their diminishing return point. You may also want to consider Hit Rating so you are less likely to miss (more damage = higher threat level – some may even argue Hit would be most important after Defense rating), Strength, as it is a good general purpose stat and increases damage, and Expertise so your hits will be dodged/parried less often. Those wishing to focus on damage (DPS) will want to focus on Strength, Hit Rating, Expertise, and Critical rating – basically in that order. Armor Penetration is important, but only if you use physical damage (Blood build). Those using spell based damage won't benefit from it as much (Frost or Unholy builds.)

It is important to note that there are diminishing returns on some stats as you near the cap. Base statistics (Strength, Stamina, Agility, Attack Power) will not hit a cap. These will be marked in green. I would recommend for those who do not want to stress out over the numbers and potentially rebalance every few levels that you focus your attention on these so you don't have to worry about over-reaching a particular goal.

It is also important to note that your gear is critical in terms of defining your role. I would say in terms of your role, gear contributes 80% while your spec contributes 20%. If, for example, all you have is tanking gear, you won't be able to do DPS (as Death Knight) even with a completely different talent spec you will have great difficulty. Your gear will effectively define your role, and trying to fill a role the gear isn't designed for will be difficult.

The changes in Cataclysm (version 4.0) should just about entirely remove the need to theorycraft. Things should become as simple as; if you want to tank choose gear with higher Stamina, and if you want to DPS choose gear with higher Strength. I'm sure we'll know more as we get closer to the launch of Cataclysm. Though nothing was said about Hit or Expertise, I'm guessing these will also disappear and become an invisible stat built into items much like Attack Power and Defense.

Some statistics increase or decrease in amount given depending on level, for those their effects will only be referenced as x. The following is listed alphabetically, not by any importance level.

Agility (implied changes in 4.0 that will remove the need to focus on a 'cap')

1 Agility = +2 Armor

x Agility = + Crit chance

x Agility = + Dodge

Increasing your Agility increases your Armor rating, Dodge chance, and chance to Critical. (Note that Agility is typically very very low compared to our Strength and Stamina.)

Armor Penetration (implied changes in 4.0 that will remove this from items)

15.39 Armor Penetration rating = +1% of enemy armor ignored

Armor Penetration causes physical damage to ignore enemy armor. This is good for only some of the DK attacks, primarily those in the Blood talent tree.

Attack Power (built in to Strength in 4.0; becomes an invisible stat we can't purposely build in to directly.)

~14 Attack Power = +1 Damage per second

Increasing your attack power increases your damage per second, thereby indirectly increasing your threat. Note that Death Knight spells are boosted by Attack Power, not Spell Power or Intelligence. Spell Power and Intelligence do not boost any Death Knight abilities as they do with other classes.

Defense (gone in 4.0; implied built into Stamina, implied changes in 4.0 that will remove the need to focus on a 'cap')

~5 Defense rating = 1 Defense point

25 Defense rating = +1% to be Missed, Dodge, Block, and Parry (before diminishing returns)

It is referenced that you will want to reach **540** Defense in order to become "uncrittable" by NPCs. (For raids, 535 is referenced for Heroic dungeons.) Exceeding this amount will have diminishing returns compared to focusing on the other statistics. However, increasing it will slightly increase your chance to be missed as well as your Dodge, Block, and Parry.

Dodge (implied changes in 4.0 that will remove the need to focus on a 'cap')

~40 Dodge rating = +1% Dodge chance

Increasing your dodge increases the chance to completely avoid being hit by an attack. I've seen reference to a cap of **88%**.

Expertise (implied changes in 4.0 that will remove the need to focus on a 'cap')

x Expertise rating = -% chance

Increasing expertise lowers the chance an NPC can Block or Parry your attacks. It has been referenced a rating of **6.5%** will prevent a boss monster from dodging your attacks, while a much higher rating of 15% is required to prevent a parry. I've also seen reference to **26** "Expertise" (not expertise rating).

Hit Rating (implied changes in 4.0 that will remove the need to focus on a 'cap')

~x Hit rating = +% chance

Increasing your hit rating will increase your chance to hit your enemy. Sources reference you want to reach 8% for melee with two-handed while a reference of 17% for spells. It is also referenced you will need to offset the dual wield penalty (for auto attacks) if you choose to dual wield. Some of this can be offset by the Nerves of Cold Steel talent. The 8% rating is a **263** value.

Parry (implied changes in 4.0 that will remove the need to focus on a 'cap')

~50 Parry rating = +1% Parry chance

Parrying blocks an incoming melee attack which resets your 'swing timer'. This is advantageous in that it makes an auto attack trigger faster. I've seen reference to a cap of **47%**.

Stamina (implied it builds into an invisible Defense stat in 4.0)

1 Stamina points = 10 Hit points

Increasing your Stamina increases Hit Points.

Strength (implied changes in 4.0 that build in to Attack Power and possibly Hit Rating)

1 Strength point = 2 Attack Power

4 Strength points = 1 Parry rating

Increasing Strength increases your ability to Parry attacks as well as increasing Attack Power, which affects damage.

As is the nature of online games, this document is always evolving with the game and with additional knowledge gained by myself or through others. Feel free to send in comments or corrections via email to rabb1t@rabb1t.com

Information used in this document was gathered from several sources, including wow.com, wowhead.com and elitestjerks.com.