

Wherever there is human culture, there will be anthropologists. This means that anthropologists are also online, studying virtual communities. To ethnographers, the Internet is one huge virtual field site where we can learn about culture in the digital age. This subfield is called Digital Ethnography.

One practitioner of digital ethnography, Colorado State University professor of anthropology Jeffrey G. Snodgrass, has conducted years of virtual research in the online gaming universe of *World of Warcraft*. In this MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game), he plays while also engaging users to discover connections between play and addiction. Snodgrass (2012) found a link between immersion in the game and addictive behaviors, especially for players who did not consider themselves traditionally “successful” in the non-gaming world.

By becoming fluent in gaming language, and interacting with other players, he achieved traditional participant-observation goals in an online environment, just as anthropologists do in face-to-face environments. The language that the online gaming community uses is like any other subgenre of language, similar to a dialect or specialized **lingo** used by insiders of that community.

While Table 2.2 contains generalized language for gaming, every game has its own set of specialized vocabulary based on the scenarios and characters. For instance, in *World of Warcraft*, the vocabulary list is extensive. The game has many different types of characters,

including hunters, druids, and paladins.

Shorthand terms allow players to hurl specific insults such as “huntard” (bad hunter), “noobid” (bad druid), or “retardin” (bad paladin). Just like in any fieldwork experience, knowledge of the language is crucial for a full and nuanced understanding of what informants mean to say.

**TABLE 2.2**  
**Online Gaming Lingo**

Term	Definition	Usage within Regular English-Language Context
afk	Away from the keyboard	“going to the fridge, will be <b>afk</b> ”
kr	Kill ratio	“her <b>kr</b> is sick”
lag	Glitching, or unusually slow speed of game response	“let’s switch servers, there’s too much <b>lag</b> ”
noob	Newbie, someone new to the game	“what a <b>noob</b> mistake”
npc	Non-player character	“i married an <b>npc</b> ; he’s so boring”
spawn	Beginning point; hub	“meet you at <b>spawn</b> ”
xp	Experience points	“you don’t have enough <b>xp</b> to enchant that sword”

Note: All lowercase letters are used for in-game conversations because of the need for speed while typing.