

Do You Dream in Color?

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Do you dream in color? To answer that question, think about and answer the questions below.

To begin with, are you “[monochromatic](#)”? That is, do you perceive only light intensity, such that you see only in shades of gray? If so, then no, you do not dream in color. (But only a very few people are monochromatic.)

Are you [color blind with certain colors](#)? For example, do you have trouble differentiating between red and green, or between blue and yellow? If so, then if you do dream in color, the colors you dream in probably correspond to the colors you can see while awake. So if you are color blind with regard to some of the colors in the questions below, then simply substitute other colors that you can see to answer the questions.

Now, in a dark unlit room, close your eyes and note the colors you perceive in your field of vision. Most people see a dark background field with patterns of light spots and/or “stars” swirling around. What color is the dark background? Most people immediately say “black”, but sometimes, if they look longer and concentrate, they may say that it’s more like a dark gray.

What color are the light spots and stars? Is it a single color? Most people say “white” or “light yellow” or “light orange”. But when they look longer and harder, some may say the light spots are a “light gray”, and that they move around on a dark gray background.

Now close your eyes while facing a bright light source. Do the colors in your field of vision change? For example, the bright spots may change from light gray to a bright light orange.

Do you ever see other colors when your eyes are closed? For example, do you ever experience [eye migraine auras](#) or [flashes of light](#)? These are generally caused by physical disturbances in the eye or by migraines, and in severe cases can be associated with epilepsy. But they probably aren’t related to dreaming in color.

Now open your eyes and look closely at a brightly colored object. Notice the vivid color “[quale](#)” that you experience in your mind’s field of vision (i.e. your “mind’s eye”). That is, if the object is red, notice the vivid redness that your mind’s eye has produced, or if blue, notice the vivid blueness in your mind’s eye, etc. That color quale is created in your mind with biological and mental technology that is still not fully understood. No

mechanical machine or device can produce that effect. One possible explanation is that the color quale is produced by special properties of a conscious electromagnetic field within the brain. (See [“How Do We Create Color Qualia in Our Mind’s Eye”](#).)

Now close your eyes and from your memory, form a mental image of the object you were just looking at. Can you form a visual image of that memory in your mind? If not, then you may have a condition known as [“aphantasia”](#), which is the inability to voluntarily form mental images in one’s mind. If you do have aphantasia, then most likely you do not dream in images of any kind, nor in color.

But very few people have aphantasia. Most of us have common phantasia, which is the ability to form mental images in our minds, but without the vivid color [“qualia”](#) that we perceive when we view the scene directly. So the mental image from our memory or imagination is generally duller and more monochromatic than the original image was when it was directly viewed.

But if the mental image that you recalled from your memory of the object has the same vivid color quale that you experienced when you viewed the object directly, then you may have a condition known as [“hyperphantasia”](#). People with hyperphantasia route their memories and imagined thoughts through their brain’s sensory cortices, so that they view the same visual color qualia and the same auditory qualia as when they see and hear directly with their senses. So hyperphantists have vivid thoughts and memories (and they often excel in the visual and auditory arts).

But hyperphantasia can be a double-edged sword. Hyperphantists can find it more difficult to distinguish reality from imagination than do people with common phantasia. Common phantists (i.e. most of us) learn to differentiate reality from imagination based on the mental control that we have over imagined thoughts, but also based on the presence or lack of sensory qualia. That is, for most of us, the presence of vivid visual and auditory qualia become solid confirmation that the current experience is from the real world, and not from one’s imagination. Hyperphantists, on the other hand, don’t have that level of confirmation. They must learn to differentiate reality from imagination based only on their feelings of mental control, and also perhaps based on prompts from other people. Sometimes these feelings and prompts can fail them, to the point where they believe their imagined thoughts are real, leading to hallucinations. (See [“What Are Out-of-Body Experiences?”](#))

Do you remember dreams from childhood that seemed real and lifelike, even scary and spooky, but you don’t have dreams like that now? If so, then you may have experimented with hyperphantasia during childhood dreams, but gave it up as your mind learned to use common phantasia to help you more definitively separate reality from imagination.

At times when you've been under stress, have you ever had particularly vivid dreams or nightmares? If so, then the stress you were under may have triggered hyperphantastic episodes of vivid dreaming.

Have you ever experimented with hallucinogenic drugs, like LSD? These drugs open your mind to hyperphantastic experiences. If you become addicted to them, you may become routinely hyperphantastic. But without a lifetime of practice and experience hyperphantastically differentiating reality from imagination, you may become severely hallucinogenic, which can lead to real problems.

If you have common phantasia, then most likely you dream with the same monochromatic imagery that you experience with your memories and imagined thoughts while awake. If you have hyperphantasia, then most likely you dream in living color. But how can you tell for sure? It may be that you dream in color, but you think you don't, because your memories of dreams are dulled just like your other memories. Or it may be that you actually dream monochromatically, but you think you dream in color, because your memories of dreams are like your memories of actual visual experiences, and you remember dreams about colored objects, which makes you conclude that your dreams are also in living color.

Or you may be that rare kind of person who has intermittent episodes of hyperphantasia, or one who can voluntarily invoke hyperphantastic memories, thoughts or dreams. But anecdotal reports of [voluntary hyperphantasia](#) indicate that that ability may be difficult to control.

So how can you tell for sure if some or all of your dreams are in living color? One way is to engage in "[lucid dreaming](#)", also known as "[creative dreaming](#)". If you practice the methods of lucid dreaming, one of the prompts you can ask yourself during a lucid dream is to note specifically whether or not you are seeing living colors. If you then remember the results of that prompt when you awaken, you should have a reliable memory of whether or not you actually saw color qualia during your dream.