

# Dream Interpretation Guide

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*"The dream is information you should have but don't."* Robert A. Johnson

## STEP 1 Write the dream down as it comes

Describe the events of the dream in a stream of consciousness.

## STEP 2 Identify the key symbols and provide spontaneous associations

Find the symbols that are pivotal to the narrative of the dream. For each symbol, write down the spontaneous associations that come immediately to mind.

**Tip:** Low-resolution associations like "I have a positive/negative/mixed association" can help in difficult cases.

## STEP 3 Describe the personal context

What happened recently in your personal life that could be associated with the dream? Write down what comes spontaneously.

## STEP 4 Feel into the inner dynamics of a dream

Dreams represent the current state of the personality in a narrative structure. Each instant is a psychic fact where symbols are contents of the psyche that are influencing consciousness. Ask yourself at every moment: Why has the unconscious decided to show this and not something else? How does it feel to be in the presence of these symbols? How does it relate to me? What personal lessons am I being taught?

**Tip:** Articulate your feelings. If you start intellectualizing, return to the feelings.

**Tip:** If you get things right, your body will autonomously react. Look out for body sensations to guide you.

## STEP 5 Aim for an interpretation that promotes self-knowledge

The interpretation should compensate the ongoing personal context or conscious attitude. What blind spot is the dream revealing?

### Checklist:

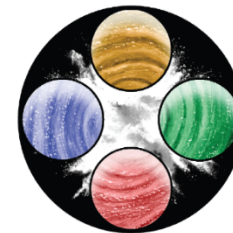
1. Are you taking the dream literally (X) or symbolically (✓)?
2. Does the interpretation confirm something you knew before (X) or did you learn something completely new (✓)?
3. Does the interpretation feel self-congratulatory (X) or does it have a humbling effect on the ego (✓)?
4. Does the interpretation teach something about others in the outer world (X) or about yourself in the inner world (✓)?

## STEP 6 Make the dream concrete with a symbolic act

Act out the insight of the dream, preferably in a symbolic manner.

**Tip:** If unsure about the interpretation, commit only to a small incremental change and wait for the next dream.

**Tip:** Don't forget to name and date the dream for easier recall.



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The two fundamental points in dealing with dreams are these: First, the dream should be treated as a fact, about which one must make no previous assumption except that it somehow makes sense; and second, the dream is a specific expression of the unconscious.

*Man and His Symbols*, 'Past and future in the unconscious'

Phantasies and dreams do not of themselves enlarge consciousness, they have to be understood and here the great difficulty begins.

*ETH Lecture 17 May 1935*, p. 208

The great importance of dreams, and the reason why we have to analyze them, is to see where we are in our unconscious. We can be God knows where in our conscious, on top of Mount Everest in our intuition, and in our unconscious not even out of the cradle.

*Visions*, p. 26

The whole dream-work is essentially subjective, and a dream is a theatre in which the dreamer is himself the scene, the player, the prompter, the producer, the author, the public, and the critic... Such an interpretation [on the subjective level] conceives all the figures in the dream as personified features of the dreamer's own personality.

*General Aspects of Dream Psychology*, CW8, par 509

Dreams do not "jumble up the personalities." On the contrary, everything is in its proper place, only you don't understand it.

*Letters Vol. 1*, p. 327

[D]reams are as simple or as complicated as the dreamer is himself, only they are always a little bit ahead of the dreamer's consciousness. I do not understand my own dreams any better than any of you, for they are always somewhat beyond my grasp and I have the same trouble with them as anyone who knows nothing about dream interpretation. Knowledge is no advantage when it is a matter of one's own dreams.

*The Tavistock Lectures*, CW 18, par 244

The art of interpreting dreams cannot be learned from books. Methods and rules are good only when we can get along without them. Only the man who can do it anyway has real skill, only the man of understanding really understands.

*The Meaning of Psychology for Modern Man*, CW 10, par 325

If we want to interpret a dream correctly, we need a thorough knowledge of the conscious situation at that moment, because the dream contains its unconscious complement, that is, the material which the conscious situation has constellated in the unconscious. Without this knowledge it is impossible to interpret a dream correctly, except by a lucky fluke.

*General Aspects of Dream Psychology*, CW 8, par 477

I make it an heuristic rule, in interpreting a dream, to ask myself: What conscious attitude does it compensate? By so doing, I relate the dream as closely as possible to the conscious situation; indeed, I would even assert that without knowledge of the conscious situation the dream can never be interpreted with any degree of certainty.

*The Practical Use of Dream-Analysis*, CW 16, par 334

One often has dreams which seem destructive and evil, the thing one cannot accept, but it is merely due to the fact that one's conscious attitude is wrong.

*Visions*, p. 406

It is as if the dream were quite uninterested in the fate of the ego, it is pure Nature, it expresses the given thing, it mirrors the state of our consciousness with complete detachment; it never says "to do it in such and such a way would be well", but states that it is so.

*ETH Lecture 8 March 1935*, p. 198

Dreams may contain ineluctable truths, philosophical pronouncements, illusions, wild fantasies, memories, plans, anticipations, irrational experiences, even telepathic visions, and heaven knows what besides.

*The Practical Use of Dream-Analysis*, CW 16, par 317

And you can be sure that the dream is your nearest friend; the dream is the friend of those who are not guided any more by the traditional truth and in consequence are isolated.

*The Symbolic Life*, CW 18, par 674

### STEP 1 Write the dream down as it comes

I had two dreams.

First dream is me **walking alone**. I woke up.

Second dream: I am in a **pharmacy** and I want **cough syrup** for my **sore throat**. The seller tells me they don't have it. "Strange. It's a common item," I think to myself. I leave and walk to the next shop.

The next shop is **Amava**, a natural health store. As I get close to it, I cannot enter. It's so overcrowded that it's impossible to go inside. Not wanting to wait, I leave and try my luck somewhere else.

I walk into a **newsagent** and look at what they sell. They have a few items. I see some **designer toasters** and it frustrates me. Disappointed, I leave the store and walk away for good.

### STEP 2 Identify the key symbols and provide spontaneous associations

**walking alone** ~ No associations.

**pharmacy** ~ Big pharma, authority, premade solutions.

**cough syrup** ~ A product I use for **sore throat** (a frequent condition I have). The **sore throat** is associated with stuck emotions.

**Amava** ~ Health shop, homeopathic medicine, helpful and competent retail clerks. Very positive associations.

**newsagent** ~ Junk shop, miscellaneous items. Slightly negative association.

**designer toasters** ~ Ugly, overpriced, scam for a basic item. Strongly negative associations.

### STEP 3 Describe the personal context

I am in a situation where I want to join a group and contribute to it, yet I don't seem to fit in. I also lost some friends recently in an unexpected conflict. I have plans for the future but I doubt I can carry them to terms.

### STEP 4 Feel into the inner dynamics of a dream

The first dream indicates isolation but it's not clear why. Thankfully, the second dream develops the theme: I first try a pre-made solution (the **pharmacy**) but they don't have what I seek. Next, I attempt to go to a place I like (**Amava**) but it's too crowded so I give up as well. The third place sells junk or overpriced items which feels like a scam. I end up alone on the streets again.

### STEP 5 Aim for an interpretation that promotes self-knowledge

The common element in the three scenes is that I don't find what I want in these places. This explains the first dream of having to go alone because the second dream shows that none of the other solutions will work.

Looking at the personal context, the dream responds to the fact that I am looking to ease an emotional problem (the **sore throat**). Going in these structures is similar to me looking to join groups to feel like I belong somewhere. While this could potentially help me emotionally, the dream states that it won't work.

### STEP 6 Make the dream concrete with a symbolic act

Consequently, I gave up on trying to join any groups and I started working on my plans for the future.