

A Quick Guide to Lucid Dreaming

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When I was in college, I took a self-directed-reading course in psychology. (One of several minors I pursued during my college career. I loved going to school!) For this course, I was able to choose any subject that intrigued me, as long as it was in the realm of psychology. I decided to study dreaming. I read a dozen different books on the subject in preparation for writing the paper I would have to write to receive a grade in the course.

It wasn't necessary, but I decided to try lucid dreaming during that semester. I kept a dream journal, and learned how to interpret dreams using common images, themes, and meanings.

For example: A vehicle that you're driving often represents how you feel about your control over a situation. If you dream that you're driving a school bus full of children and the brakes go out as you're careening downhill, it's likely that you're feeling a great deal of anxiety over responsibility for others (the kids on the bus). But the situation (the bus, the hill, the brakes) feels out of your control.

A vehicle you're driving in a dream can also represent your body. Is it sluggish, unable to pick up speed no matter how hard you press the gas pedal? Does it die on you just as you approach an intersection? That could be an indication that your body needs some rest, or maybe a little tune-up.

But enough about the details. Here's the big picture:

In a lucid dream, the dreamer is aware that they are dreaming, and they can often control the dream as it is happening. They are also able to remember their dreams upon waking, or go back to sleep and finish a dream, giving it a more satisfactory ending.

Our sleep cycles look like a wave pattern. When we dream, we are in a REM (or rapid-eye-movement) phase of sleep. It is represented as a dip in the wave. After a REM cycle, we come close to waking, but then drop down again for another REM cycle. We usually have several REM cycles before we wake fully.

The first step in lucid dreaming is to train the body to wake more fully after each REM cycle. As you're falling asleep, set the intention that you will wake after every dream and remember the details. When that happens, sit up and jot down the bones of the dream so you can think about it later.

Once you get good at that, set the intention that as you are dreaming, you will be aware that you're dreaming. You can even set the intention that you'll dream of a solution to some problem or situation that is bothering you. If you have a nightmare, you can recognize that you're dreaming and manipulate the dream into a situation you can control. You can even

decide to continue or replay a dream you were having when you woke up, and manipulate the outcome the second time around.

It may sound simpler than it is, but it's really just a matter of intention and practice. Give it a whirl and let me know what you think!