



Great acting comes from a well-developed imagination. But many aspiring actors' imaginations are undeveloped or blocked. In this article, part two in a 10 part series, you will learn exercises you can do on your own to expand your imagination.

Your imagination is the source of your creativity. Imagination is defined as "creative ability" and "a creation of the mind; an idealized or poetic creation." Imagining is "the act or power of forming a mental image of something not present to the [external] senses or never before wholly perceived in [external] reality." To imagine is to create.

Yet in some actor training, the imagination is given little attention. The training only instructs you to "use your imagination." Or you are only given a simple instruction about how to use your imagination for emotional preparation. Or you are told that intellectual analysis is all you need to ignite your imagination – absurd.

In many of the 20<sup>th</sup> century acting methods, there is no work to develop or unblock your imagination. Because of recent advances in consciousness research, there are many more ways to expand and unblock your imagination.

### ***Dreams Are Your Imagination At Play***

Every night you dream, even if you don't remember. Your dreams are your imagination at play. Dreams are organized and profoundly intelligent. For thousands of years, most cultures have had a process for relating to dreams. Western culture, especially the United States, tends to ignore the creative genius of dreams.

Great acting arises from the world of dreams. For the world of dreams is your imagination. It seems the entire universe, literally, may be available to you via your dream world. When you connect with your dreams, you are accessing the core of your talent.

Because our culture ignores or ridicules dreams, some aspiring actors have trouble remembering them. Here are some ways to cultivate dream recall:

1) Get as much sleep as you want. Sleep doesn't make you lazy. Getting enough sleep is vital for creative people. Sleep is undervalued in our culture. There are great books about the science of sleep. Those books changed my life as an artist. If you are tired, go to bed earlier. If you are chronically under slept, you may not remember your dreams and it may take you months to catch up on sleep. You may feel groggy in the meantime.

Sleep balances you emotionally, increases your emotional depth, burns fat, strengthens your immune system and builds muscle. Sleep makes you more creative because it allows your imagination to play. While you sleep, your imagination works on your acting. Do not use an alarm to wake up. It panics

your body into awakening. Using an alarm makes dream recall far less likely.

2) Cut down on caffeine. Caffeine drug addiction is very powerful. The caffeine industry spends millions of dollars on “research” that tells you caffeine is great. Caffeine interferes with dream recall because it jerks you awake each morning, because of drug withdrawal. This traumatic awakening makes dream recall far less likely. Gently awakening in the morning keeps the “door” to your unconscious dream world open longer.

3) Cut down on drugs (recreational or prescribed), sugar and alcohol, for similar reasons to number two. Drugs and alcohol generally reduce ambition and your connection to your emotions and imagination.

4) Put a pencil and journal by your bed with the intention of writing down your dreams. Simply having this intention increases dream recall and deepens your relationship to your imagination.

When you awaken and remember images from your dreams, see how they make you feel. Connect with each image in your dream and explore the energies and feelings that arise. All images in your dreams are aspects of your psyche – aspects of your personality. This is true even for images that cause fear or vulnerability.

You can ask yourself “sensory questions”\* about your dreams to re-create your dreams around you. You can explore the people, places, aliens, things, etc. in your “dreamscape” with powerful emotional results. The images in your imagination are just as real to your psyche as the waking world.

The more you relate to your dreams, the more you expand your imagination and connect to it – and thus expand your talent.

Avoid "dream code" books that tell you what your dreams mean. Your dreams are your own creation. This is not about figuring your dreams out. It is about connecting you to your imagination and emotional world by increasingly relating you to your dreams.

Stop thinking about your dreams as "stupid," "weird," "crazy," etc. When you insult your dreams, you are abusing yourself and your talent.

In our classes, we explore many ways to use your dreams for your acting. This article is only about expanding your imagination. There are very powerful ways to translate all this work to performance, but they can't be covered in this article.

But simply relating to your dreams will have immediate effects on your acting. The more connected you are to your dreams, the more connected you are to the source of your best acting: your imagination. However, some people rarely remember their dreams. You can still be a great actor even if you do not consciously remember your dreams. Night dreams are one way to connect with your imagination.

### ***Daydreams All Day***

All day long you can work on your imagination. Start paying attention to the fantasies you have

throughout your day. A daydream can be one second long and consist of a single image. Each image is your creativity in action.

Daydreams are not laziness. They are highly intelligent, spontaneous creative events. And you should encourage them. Most of us live in our rational mind. Start tuning into these daydreams and you cultivate energetic balance and increase your creativity.

Here are some examples of daydreams:

You are in the subway and see someone attractive and instantly you imagine marrying him or her. You are in an argument and you get the image of shooting him or her with a gun. You are in a job interview and you get the image of screaming "Go to hell, I hate job interviews," and running out. You are walking down the street and you get the image of begging for money. You are working out at the gym and you get the image of being on a beach sipping a cold glass of lemonade. You are at your boring day job and you get the image of being on a stage in front of thousands of people who are giving you a standing ovation.

Encourage these daydreams. Follow them. Keep a journal of images. Ask yourself how they make you feel. You can do Personal (covered in part one of this series) about your dreams or daydreams -- Dream Inventory.

Your dreams and daydreams give you a direct experience of your archetypes. Your imagination is made of archetypes. The more connected you are to a whole range of archetypes, the better your acting. You can read about archetypes on our website.

### ***Actively Fantasizing***

Make up stories about people! Sit on a park bench and look at someone and imagine what his or her life is like. The more you do this, the more you expand your imagination. Ask yourself how these fantasies make you feel.

Example: I'm sitting on the subway looking at an older Asian women reading a Chinese newspaper. I wonder what her life is like... I imagine her coming to the U.S. on a boat from China many years ago. People are cramped in this very hot boat. People are crying, children are screaming. There isn't enough food. The journey is painful. People die. I wonder if she is married now. She made it to New York. Wow, that makes me feel proud to be an American. Wait, she came on a boat so I guess she landed in Long Beach, CA. (It's a fantasy, go with it. It doesn't have to make sense.) I bet she and her husband don't have sex. She's so plain looking; she has flakes of skin coming off her hair onto her blouse. Eww, I imagine them having sex. How awful. Yuck. I feel nausea in my stomach. There is no passion and the sex happens because she is supposed to serve her husband. She is repressed and barely expresses any emotions. She loves to cook, though. She cooks many wonderful meals for her family and goes to Chinatown and explores all the shops. It's noisy down in Chinatown, there are so many people there...and on and on.

You just make it up! Do it vividly. See the colors, smell the smells, use all your senses. Be absurd and illogical. It is fantastical. Be a kid. Have fun. Go into emotional areas that make you uncomfortable. Imagine things most people don't let themselves imagine. Be socially unacceptable in your fantasies.

You can also imagine things happening to a person you are looking at: like a banana growing out of their ear, or them having sex with Bill Clinton, or their face melting from nuclear radiation, or them getting shot, or turning into an animal. You can also imagine yourself doing things you would never really do: like robbing a bank, leading a religious service, running for President or flying like a bird.

The more you do this, the stronger your imagination gets. And notice how everything you imagine makes you feel. Each fantasy has its own emotional life.

Spend five minutes on one person and five minutes on someone else -- whatever. Have fun. If you do this each day for a month, it will have amazing results. Doing this kind of exercise increases your curiosity about people and the world.

Great actors are curious about people. We talk to people and fantasize about them. Interview real people about who they are and what is important to them. You are building an imaginative library of humanity and real (or imagined) stories that you can call upon for your entire career. There are hundreds of exercises you can learn to develop your imagination.

Honor yourself in this process. If working with your dreams causes you discomfort you feel you should avoid, consult a therapist who works with dreams. Similarly, sharing your fantasies with "regular" people, like at an office job, is probably a bad idea.

Your fantasies are yours. Fantasies have powerful meaning for you. Perhaps they are sacred. Some believe our imagination is how we receive inspiration from a higher intelligence.

Certainly, fantasies cause your "acting" in life far more than logical reasoning. Fantasies associated with feelings are what motivate behavior, not intellectual analysis.

Thus, as an actor you must honor the Gods of the Imagination and Fantasy. The more you honor these Gods, the more likely it is that your acting will be spontaneous, unpredictable, specific and multi-dimensional. Because the language of dreams is universal, the more you "act" from this world, the more your acting will seem "truthful and real."

Stay tuned for part three of this 10 part series coming in a few weeks. Happy Acting!

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\* Sensory Process – The Sensory Process is one of the five fundamental tools of acting. It is used to support the Imaging process in the creation of imaginary people, places or things (objects). It is also used to re-create real people, places or things from your life, such that they are "present" for you while acting. When it is used in the latter fashion, it is most often called "Sense Memory." The Sensory Process trains your senses to respond to objects as if they are really there. You can learn this very specific, and often misunderstood, tool in workshops at the school.