

Dream Map Prep

The stage is set now to define your biggest dreams. But before you begin brainstorming, keep the following three guiding principles in mind.

Big Excitement Comes from Big Challenge

I recall a magazine contest from my days as video game-addicted ten-year-old: the full-page ad displayed a big screen television, every video game system in production, full accessories and a dozen games cartridges, all of which you could win if you completed a series of increasingly difficult mail-in puzzles. My brother and I spent days working on those puzzles. We never won, but we still worked our butts off and had a good time. Why? Because the payoff was huge, the puzzles were nearly impossible and we loved video games. It all added up to a huge sense of excitement.

Most teens (and adults) tell themselves that their largest dreams are impossible to achieve, and they consequently set reasonable goals for themselves. The boy who wants to write a book settles for a more reasonable short story. The girl who wants to meet a human genome decoder settles for a chapter in a biology textbook. Being reasonable is hailed as common sense, but it's in fact self-sabotage in two ways.

Firstly, by setting a low challenge/low payoff goal, you immediately shrink the energy quota you'll apply toward the goal. Would my brother and I have spent hours playing detective to Super Mario and Zelda's personal lives if only a single Nintendo system was at stake? No way. If you're excited to learn how hybrid cars are built, shooting for a full-blown factory tour will inspire you more toward action than reading a few online articles. Baby steps are important, but only as steps toward something much bigger. Overambitious goals are the key to seeding any long-lasting ambition.

.....Secondly, with the whole world focused on reasonable goals,
competition for big, unreasonable goals is surprisingly small. How

many teens call the hybrid car factory and ask to tour the line? My guess is zero. Therefore, you have zero competition. You're not going to become an astronaut or make personal calls to Nobel prize winners by simply wishing it. But if you're one of the few (or the first) in a field, and you've got a little perseverance, you can set the rules. Of course teens take personalized tours of car factories. Didn't you know?

Production is More Exciting than Consumption

Writing is more exciting than reading. Directing and editing a movie is more exciting than watching a movie. Coding a computer program creates a rush where simply using one does not. Production—the act of creation—is more exciting than simply consuming.

Consumption (of things like books, movies, computers) is indeed necessary to inform and inspire creation. But too much consumption leads to analysis paralysis: getting lost in excessive information absorption. Modern teens succumb far more often to over-consumption than over-production. Escape analysis paralysis by focusing dreams whenever possible on production.

Guilt is a Poor Motivator

Unschoolers tend to have a keen sense of social justice. This leads them to dreams of helping the homeless, feeding the hungry or saving the whales. Follow these dreams, but not at the expense of censoring your self-oriented goals. If the thought of performing Cirque de Soleil-level acrobatics (a totally self-oriented goal) makes you shudder with exhilaration, go for it. If you want to volunteer 80 hours a week for a nonprofit, that's fine too. But do it out of excitement, not guilt.

The Dream-Mapping Workshop

.....Now let's put it all together. To begin dream mapping, start with a..... blank sheet of paper. Turn it sideways. This is your map. You'll also

want a few sheets of scratch paper for fleshing out wordings before putting them on your main map.

Dream maps begin in the middle, with your biggest dreams, and move progressively outward as you break your dreams down into smaller, more concrete steps.

Write small, because you're about to think big.⁸

Dream Mapping, Step 1: Define the Biggies

We'll begin by trolling for your biggest, deepest, most unreasonable dreams. Ask yourself the following two questions and use scratch paper to record every answer that pops into your head.

- ◆ What would you do if failure were impossible?
- ◆ What would make you most excited to wake up in the morning?

In defining the biggies, you'll notice that dreams come in three flavors: Things, Experiences and Characteristics.

- ◆ Thing dreams involve owning something (your own car, \$5000 in a savings account or a new laptop).



..... ————— Dream Map — Step 1 —————

- ◆ Experience dreams involve doing something (traveling to India, meeting a favorite author or writing a novel).
- ◆ Characteristic dreams involve being something (a crocheting master, fully versed in Egyptian history or a world-class sailor).

Aim to create at least one goal in each flavor. To help spark your creativity, you can apply the first two questions to each flavor. For example: What experience would I pursue if I knew I couldn't fail? What characteristic would make me excited to wake up in the morning?

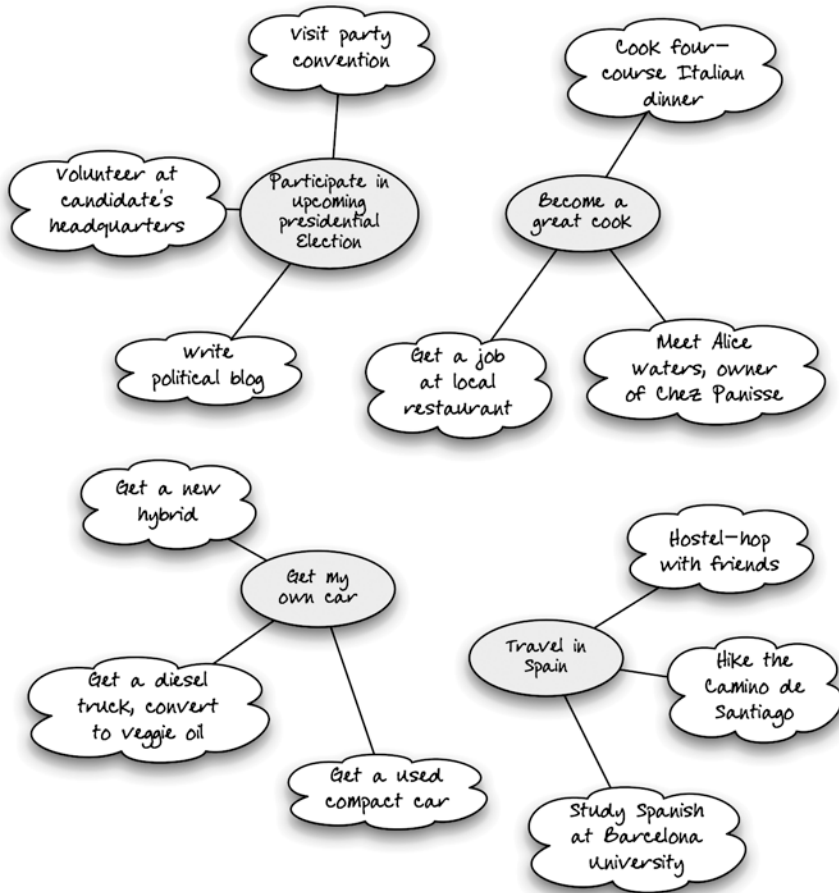
Write three to five big dreams in the center of your map. This example dream map begins with four dreams.

Dream Mapping, Step 2: Cerebral → VAK

Next, take each of your big dreams and scan them for cerebrals: abstract words and phrases that have many possible interpretations. Freedom and responsibility are quintessential cerebral words. Become an awesome guitarist is a cerebral phrase, as is save the planet, make money or travel the world. Cerebrals are not bad in themselves; big dreams often emerge in unspecific terms. Your dream to spend a month learning Kendo in Japan may begin as a vague desire to travel. On their own, however, cerebrals leave you helpless to take action.

If I dream to spend a lot of time in the outdoors (a cerebral phrase), I'll sit outside with my finger up my nose. If I dream to go on a long backpacking trip (less cerebral), then I can start researching trails. And better yet, if I dream to hike the 2,650-mile Pacific Crest Trail between April and September (not cerebral), I'll know exactly what to do. Cerebrals need modification to become accomplishable.

The antidote to cerebral dreams is visual, auditory and kinesthetic (VAK) language. Because humans ultimately trace the meaning



———— Dream Map — Step 2 ————

of cerebral phrases like find myself back to perceived (visual) sights, (auditory) sounds and (kinesthetic) feelings, VAK dreams having a higher chance of getting done. To change a dream from cerebral → VAK, write it in language that you can see, hear or feel.

- Save the planet → Plant ten redwood trees in my city park
(kinesthetic)
- Travel internationally → See the Eiffel Tower, Arc de
Triomphe and Parthenon (visual)
- Spend time outdoors → Listen to the rainfall in a cloud
forest (auditory)
- Become an awesome guitarist → Play five songs on the
electric guitar (kinesthetic)

Notice that dreams changed to VAK language become incredibly specific. They do this by including numbers (e.g. five songs, three places to see in Paris) and visual/auditory/kinesthetic details (redwood trees, rainfall). The more specific the dream, the more power you have to realize it.

Also notice that turning a characteristic dream (e.g., Become an awesome guitarist) into VAK language changes it to an experience dream (Play five songs on the electric guitar). This leaves you with only two types of dreams—experiences and things—each of which is straightforward to pursue.

Change each of your big, cerebral dreams to VAK language. But don't just do it once. For each big dream, brainstorm three VAK options. Draw them in bubbles radiating outward from the parent bubble. Three is a vital number because you'll later choose between these different paths to accomplish your dream.

- Save the planet →
1. Plant ten redwood trees in my city park
 2. Research peak oil and nuclear alternatives
 3. Introduce five neighborhood kids to local flora and fauna

Become an awesome guitarist →

1. Play five songs on the electric guitar
2. Perform a cover song at the local coffeehouse
3. Read two books on music theory

Travel internationally →

1. See the Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe and Parthenon
2. Visit relatives in Russia for one month
3. Build houses in Mexico over spring break

Spend time outdoors →

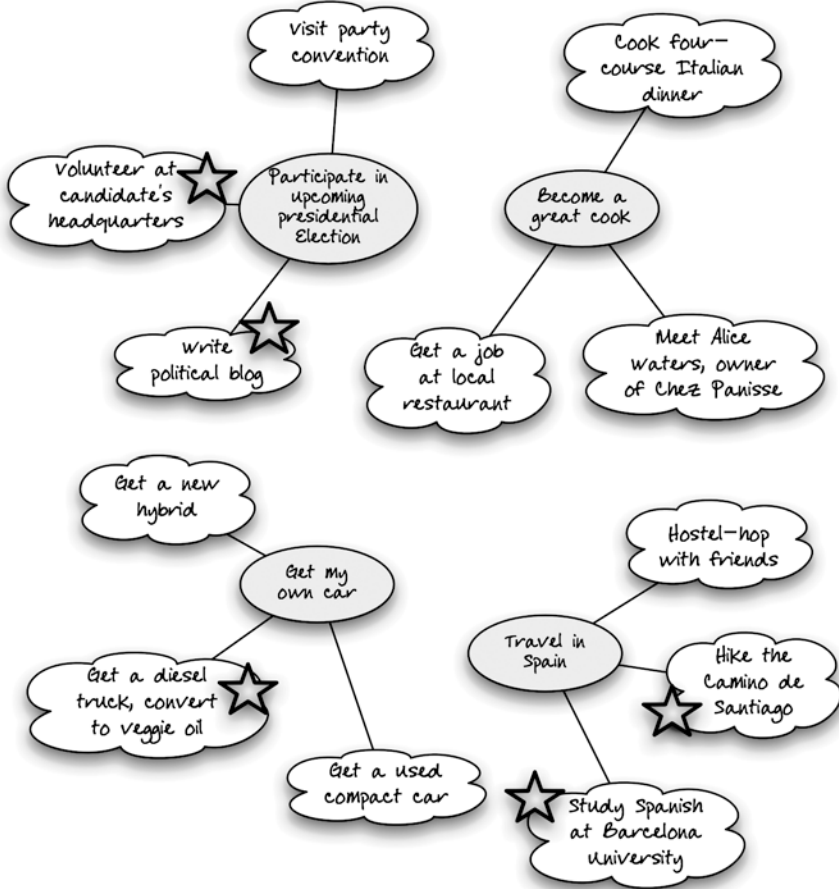
1. Listen to rainfall in a cloud forest
2. Run 40 miles each week for eight weeks
3. Learn to race dogs in Alaska

Dream Mapping, Step 3: Fat-Cutting

Now it's time to prioritize. Of all the VAK options you've just created, choose the five that really excite you. If a malicious genie suddenly placed a death sentence upon you, these are the things that you would do before you died. You don't necessarily need to choose one option from each big dream. Just choose five and put a star next to each one.

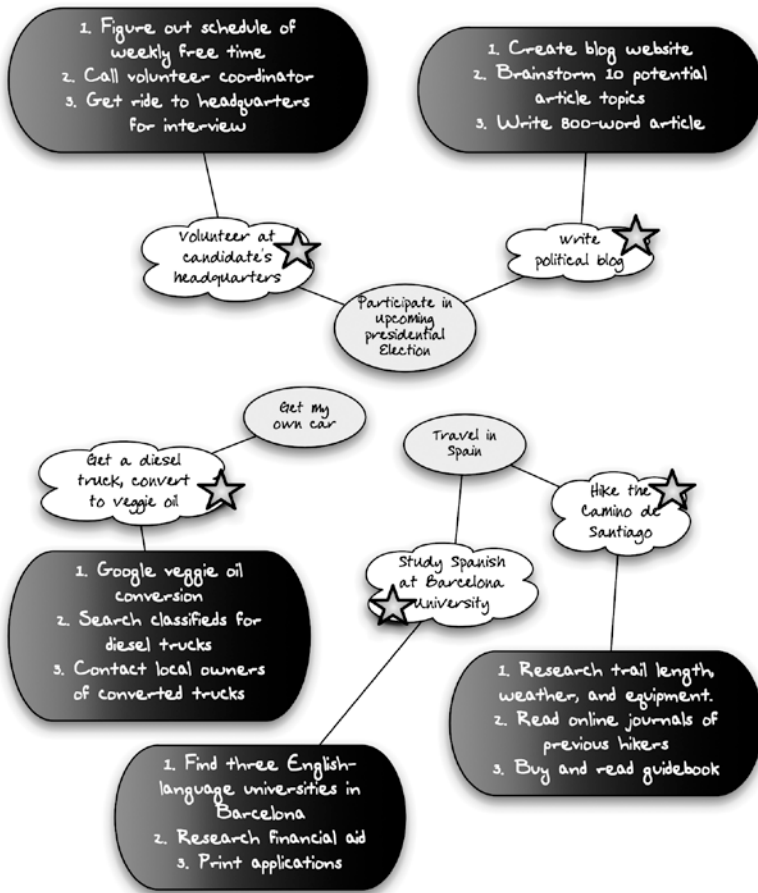
Dream Mapping, Step 4: Baby Steps

With your dream map now narrowed to five high priority and accomplishable steps, it's finally time to get reasonable. Let's break down each starred bubble into three baby steps that you can start today.....



— Dream Map — Step 3 —

For each starred bubble, draw one more radiating bubble. In the bubble, repeat the process of brainstorming three VAK options. These are your baby steps. Baby steps should be totally concrete. They should be so concrete that if you gave a list of baby steps to a stranger, he would know exactly what to do with them. And unlike our previous VAK options, baby steps have a timeline. Of the three steps you create.....



———— Dream Map — Step 4 ————

Baby steps are the most important part of dream mapping. Thinking of big cerebrals is a relatively easy process, but only through concrete action will you discover which dreams are actually yours and which are implanted.

Your Finished Dream Map

Congratulations! A finished dream map is a beautiful thing—a practical and personal work of art. Keep it in a convenient location, like a desk drawer or taped to the wall above your computer. We'll call on at various points throughout the book.

Create a Dream Book

The last step in defining your dreams is starting a dream book.

Dream mapping is a cyclical energy generator. After seeing the success of your first baby steps, your mind will flood with more and more dreams. They'll come at odd hours: in the shower, during a run or while you're sleeping. Letting a dream nugget slip away can be a sad loss, because if and when you remember it (days or weeks later), a chance opportunity may have passed. To prevent runaway dreams, use a dream book.

A dream book is a blank journal or notebook that you keep close to your body (e.g. in a pocket, backpack or handbag) at all times of day. Armed with a few reliable pens, use the book to jot down every dream, goal, VAK option or baby step that pops into your mind. Draw dream maps when the inspiration hits you. If you're a visual artist, draw your dreams in pictures. If you prefer, keep two books: one for spontaneous notes and the other for precision-crafted maps.

Jim Wiltens, summer camp director extraordinaire and mentor to my young adulthood, started his first dream book at age 14. His current book is over 30 years old. Jim (a more traditional adventurer) credits his dream book with inspiring him to

- ◆ maroon himself on a deserted island in British Columbia for an entire month.
- ◆ kayak on the Amazon river through headhunter territory.
- ◆ train and ride camels through India and Nepal.

- ◆ run the only roadless lodge-based wilderness summer camp in California.
- ◆ write six books (both fiction and non-fiction).

Jim's own hero for goal setting was John Goddard who, in 1940 at the age of 15, sat at his kitchen table and wrote a list of 127 goals, 109 of which he has completed today. John's teenage goals included such ambitious plans as pilot the world's fastest aircraft, read the entire Encyclopedia Britannica, study primitive cultures of the Sudan and publish an article in National Geographic—adventures that he immediately embarked upon at an age when most teens consider school the only point of their lives.⁹

Where will your dream book take you?