

## The Classification and Coding of Settings

- [Introduction](#)
- [Location](#)
  - [Indoor](#)
  - [Outdoor](#)
  - [Ambiguous](#)
  - [No Setting](#)
- [Familiarity](#)
  - [Familiar](#)
  - [Distorted](#)
  - [Geographical](#)
  - [Unfamiliar](#)
  - [Questionable](#)
- [Coding Procedures](#)
  - [Determining the Number of Settings](#)
  - [Summary of Coding Symbols](#)

### Coding Rules

[Characters](#)

[Aggression](#)

[Friendliness](#)

[Sexuality](#)

[Activities](#)

[Success & Failure](#)

[Mis/Good Fortune](#)

[Emotions](#)

**[Settings](#)**

[Objects](#)

[Descriptive Elements](#)

### Introduction

The characters in a dream report do not act, interact, emote, strive, and meet their fate in a vacuum. The dream report usually contains physical surroundings which are divided into two very general categories in the Hall/Van de Castle system: settings and [objects](#). Generally speaking, settings and objects have not been quite as interesting as some of the categories that already have been presented, but they sometimes have their uses.

Almost all dream reports include some form of recognizable setting, and dreamers frequently begin their report by saying something about the setting. In the same way that there are often several acts and scenes to a play, so, too, is it common for the setting to change during the course of a dream narrative, sometimes quite abruptly.

### Location

Establishing the categories for settings was the most difficult aspect of the entire coding system. The initial efforts to classify settings included a rather extensive number of possible settings. However, it was impossible to obtain adequate intercoder reliability when such a large number were involved, so we eventually collapsed all settings into two broad groupings: indoor and outdoor settings.

**Indoor settings** consist of those in which the dreamer is within a building. The building may be a house, hotel, church, factory, barracks, or some other structure. Any room such as a living room, cellar, or attic is therefore an indoor setting, as are offices, elevators, hallways, stairs, or other regions within buildings. Also considered indoor settings are those areas attached to or part of the exterior of a building. Examples of the latter which would be coded as indoor settings are instances where the dreamer is located on a porch, roof, fire escape, or ledge of a building. Open-air buildings such as amphitheaters or stadiums are also coded as indoor settings. The coding symbol for indoor settings is **I**.

**Outdoor settings** are those where the dreamer is described as being out-of-doors or outside a building. Settings occurring in nature, such as when the dreamer is at the beach, in the woods, or on a mountain, are included, as well as urban settings, such as streets, sidewalks, yards, parking lots, and cemeteries. The setting is considered an outside one if the dreamer is in a car, train, boat or airplane, unless the car is in a garage or the airplane is in a hangar. Being in a tunnel or cave is coded as an outdoor setting. The coding symbol for outdoor settings is **O**.

The decision as to whether a setting should be coded I or O is generally not a difficult one, and a high level of coding agreement can be readily achieved for the distinction between them.

In a few cases, it appears that a setting is definitely present, but it cannot be determined whether it should be coded I or O because the dreamer has not supplied sufficient information. For instance, he might say, "We went to the country club," and it is not clear whether the dreamer is referring to some sort of building or whether he means the golf course, tennis area, or swimming pool. We handle these infrequent cases by coding such settings as **ambiguous** and indicate this by the coding symbol **A**.

An even more infrequent situation is the one in which no setting is described. Short dreams or those which seem to be only some fragment of a longer dream are the ones most likely not to contain any setting. These dreams are coded with the symbol **NS**, which stands for **no setting**. The presence of any object or description of any surroundings, no matter how vague, is sufficient to warrant some type of setting code, other than NS.

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## Familiarity

Having determined the locale of the dream, the next phase of coding settings involves determining the degree of familiarity that the dreamer reports for the setting. Five levels of familiarity are distinguished in our coding system.

**Familiar settings** (coding symbol: **F**) are those in which it appears quite clear that the dreamer recognizes the setting as being a personally familiar one, such as his own or a friend's home, place of employment, or worship. If the setting is a well-known or famous one which the dreamer can identify, such as the Empire State Building, Mt. Everest, or Arlington Cemetery, it is coded as being a familiar setting, even though the dreamer may never have been there. Thus, if the dreamer is able specifically to identify a setting or indicates that he has prior acquaintance with it, an F code is given.

**Distorted settings** (coding symbol: **D**) are familiar settings which the dreamer indicates involve an element of peculiarity or incongruity because they differ in some respect from the way the dreamer knows the setting to be in waking life. Coding is fairly liberal for this category so that a setting containing any distortion, even of a minor nature, is coded D. The distortion, however, must involve the physical surroundings rather than the appearance of any character. *The D code takes precedence over any other setting code.*

**Geographical settings** (coding symbol: **G**) are those in which the dreamer identifies the settings according to their geographical location, such as Europe, Illinois, or San Francisco. If the dreamer also indicates that the setting is a personally familiar one, the F coding is given precedence over the G coding.

**Unfamiliar settings** (coding symbol: **U**) are those which are not known to the dreamer. Sometimes the dreamer will be very explicit and state that the setting is a place he has never seen or visited before, or sometimes the adjective "strange" will be used to indicate that the setting is not recognized as a familiar one. In other instances, the vague description of the setting will often reveal the lack of familiarity. Statements showing this vague quality are: "I was in some house," "I was driving down the street of a large city," "We went to what looked like a hotel," "The furniture suggested this was a kitchen where we were talking." If the coder can answer yes to the question, "Does the description of the setting strongly suggest that the dreamer has not actually been in this setting in his waking life," the setting is coded U. It should be kept in mind that the coding will not always be U if the dreamer has never been in the setting in waking life for if the setting is a famous one it is coded F, if it is referred to as some specific geographical location it is coded G, and if there is something incongruous about the arrangement of the setting it is coded D.

**Questionable settings** (coding symbol: **Q**) are coded when it cannot be determined whether the setting is a familiar or unfamiliar one. The description provided in the dream report is often insufficient to establish the familiarity or unfamiliarity of a setting with any degree of assurance, so Q is a frequently employed code.

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## Coding Procedures

Coding settings is generally fairly easy. Deciding whether a setting should be coded U or Q and determining the total number of settings are the coding problems which pose the greatest difficulty. In order to illustrate the various combinations of codes which may occur, a list of examples is provided below.

**IF** "I was in MY ROOM getting dressed."

- ID** "It looked like my HISTORY CLASSROOM EXCEPT THE DESKS WERE OF KINDERGARTEN SIZE."
- IG** "I looked out the hotel window and saw NEW YORK CITY below."
- IU** "We were in what seemed to be A CELLAR."
- IQ** "I was IN A STORE buying a pair of shoes."
- OF** "I was yelling from OUR NEIGHBOR'S DRIVEWAY."
- OD** "I was in OUR BACKYARD BUT THE BIG OAK TREE WAS MISSING."
- OG** "We were swimming AT SOME HAWAIIAN BEACH."
- OU** "The path THROUGH THESE UNFAMILIAR LOOKING WOODS was a very crooked one."
- OQ** "THE FOOTBALL FIELD we were playing on was muddy."
- AF** "THE VIEW OF THE EIFFEL TOWER was magnificent."
- AD** "I was back AT COLLEGE BUT IT LOOKED MORE LIKE MY HIGH SCHOOL."
- AG** "I was back SOMEWHERE IN VERMONT again."
- AU** I COULDN'T TELL MUCH ABOUT MY SURROUNDINGS BUT I KNEW I HAD NEVER BEEN THERE BEFORE."
- AQ** "I was sitting ON TOP OF A FLAG POLE."
- NS** "All I could see was this old lady who kept scowling at me. That was the whole dream."

## Determining the Number of Settings

The rules for determining the number of settings are given below along with coding examples. Consistent with the format that appears throughout these pages, items to be coded will appear in capital letters while items which may seem relevant, but which should not be coded, are italicized.

1. In order for a setting to be coded, the dreamer must appear as an observer in the setting. Do not code settings in which other characters are located unless the dreamer appears as an observer in the same place.

"I was walking through what I thought were THE STREETS OF NEW ORLEANS (**OG**)."  
 "He said that he and my other fraternity brothers had gone for a drive through *the streets of New Orleans*."

2. All changes in location within a single building are coded as a single indoor setting. Changes in location from one building to a different building are coded as separate indoor settings.

"I stopped IN THE TODDLE HOUSE (**IF**) for a cup of coffee and then went to A BEAUTY PARLOR (**IQ**) to get my hair done."  
 "We hunted for it IN THE ATTIC (**IQ**) then went downstairs and continued the search in the *rooms on the second floor* and finally wound up looking *in the cellar* but without any success."

3. If any type of codeable intervening setting occurs, the same indoor location may be coded more than once.

"We quickly packed a lunch AT DOROTHY'S HOUSE (**IF**), then drove for a while IN THE COUNTRY (**OQ**) and returned to DOROTHY'S HOUSE (**IF**) and listened to records."  
 "I left the LIVING ROOM OF THIS OLD GLOOMY HOUSE (**IU**), walked THROUGH THE STRANGE GARDEN OUTSIDE (**OU**), and then for some reason

returned again to THE HOUSE (**IU**) and walked through the back door."

4. Outdoor settings are coded separately if they involve clearly differentiated and separate regions. If the dreamer is describing different areas of a larger region, a single overall outdoor setting is coded.

"We attended the burial at THE CATHOLIC CEMETERY (**OF**) then drove off to SOME NEARBY SMALL TOWN (**OQ**) to talk."

"As I was walking THROUGH SOME FOREST (**OU**) I came across a *group of pine trees*, then I walked through a *grove of aspen* and further on through a small *stand of junipers*."

5. If any type of codeable intervening setting occurs, the same outdoor location may be coded more than once.

"We were surfing at SOME BEACH THAT I COULDN'T RECOGNIZE (**OU**) when the scene shifted to some STRANGE ROOM THAT HAD PAINTINGS ALL OVER THE WALLS (**IU**), and then I was back surfing at the SAME BEACH (**OU**) again."

6. In order for an additional setting to be coded, some action should take place within the new setting or the dreamer must describe himself as actually being located in the new setting.


"AFTER WALKING IN THE RAIN (**OQ**) for what seemed a long time, I ARRIVED AT MY FRIEND'S HOME AND WENT INSIDE TO GET DRY (**IF**)."


"AFTER WALKING IN THE RAIN (**OQ**) for what seemed a long time, *I arrived at my friend's home*."

## Summary of Coding Symbols for Settings

<i>Location</i>	<i>Familiarity</i>
<b>I</b> indoor	<b>F</b> familiar
<b>O</b> outdoor	<b>D</b> distorted
<b>A</b> ambiguous	<b>G</b> geographical
	<b>U</b> unfamiliar
	<b>Q</b> questionable
<b>NS</b> no setting	

[\(Return to top\)](#)

 [Go back](#) to the coding rules index.

 [Move on](#) to the coding rules for objects.

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