



## Special Issue Outside the box: A celebration of Sergio Della Sala's contribution.: Discussion Forum

### Definition: Aphantasia



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The term “aphantasia” refers to the absence, or near-absence, of imagery, most commonly the inability to visualise things that are outside our field of view while we are in a state of full wakefulness. This implies an inability to form mental images with sensory attributes (e.g., to visualize a picture in the mind's eye), as opposed to ‘thinking about’ the item in question.

The deficit affects the ability to form images deliberately (e.g. in response to a specific instruction like ‘visualise an apple’). It may also affect the ability to form images spontaneously (e.g. automatically visualizing a scene while reading a novel). Imagery in dreams or on the verge of sleep is often preserved.

Aphantasia may be congenital, even if identified in adulthood, or acquired, because of neurological or psychiatric injury or disorder.

**Labels.** Since the inability to visualise is often accompanied by an absence or diminution of imagery in other sensory

modalities (e.g. lack of auditory imagery), the label is commonly used more broadly to refer to the absence or diminution of sensory imagery in other or all sense modalities. If so, the name should be qualified, as appropriate, by the sense in question, e.g. visual aphantasia or auditory aphantasia. If the deficit involves several, but not all, sensory modalities, it should be termed multisensory aphantasia; if it affects all sensory modalities it should be termed global aphantasia.

Some researchers have proposed, in contrast, that the term aphantasia should be reserved specifically for the absence of visual imagery. If so, alternative terms such as ‘anauralia’ for the absence of auditory imagery are required to refer to the absence of sensory imagery in particular modalities. ‘Dysikonesia’ has been used to refer to the global absence of imagery.

Acquired aphantasia has been referred to also, in the clinical literature, using terms such as ‘defective revisualisation’ and ‘visual irremembrance’.

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The converse of aphantasia, the experience of imagery so vivid that it rivals perception, has been described as ‘hyperphantasia’.

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**Adam Zeman:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Merlin Monzel:** Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Joel Pearson:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Christian O. Scholz:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Julia Simner:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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