

# Visualization practice

In visualization, you use the technique athletes have used for decades. Visualizations let you see yourself succeeding, and many consider it a great training technique. Visualizations help you prepare yourself psychologically for a dive, and can be particularly useful if you are trying something challenging for the first time, such as wreck dive.

Before you begin, make sure you have at least 20 minutes blocked off in your day planner so you will not feel rushed. Visualization exercises also work very well after practicing the poses. Arrange a comfortable seated position that enables you to maintain a long spine, such as sitting on a pillow with your back against the wall. You can also practice in Corpse pose if you can do so without falling asleep.

Begin with your eyes closed, and count your breath, “inhale 1-2-3-4, exhale 4-3-2-1,” keeping an even steady rhythm. We recommend using Regulator Breath as much as you can during your visualization session: place the tip of your tongue against the back of your teeth, as you would when cautiously inhaling with a regulator, and let your cheeks gently puff with each exhale through the mouth. When you feel your heart rate slow down, shift your concentration away from the breath and begin to work through the visualization. We have two suggested visualizations here to get you started; you may want to ask a friend to read these to you the first time you practice. These visualizations are suggestions to give you ideas for creating your own.

## Visualization 1: Enjoying a smooth dive

This visualization serves as a great general dive preparation. We will describe this as a shore dive, but if you find yourself diving from a boat more often, then substitute the details of a boat dive for a shore dive. Also, we will describe some life found in the Caribbean, but you can substitute the aquatic life from either the region you most often dive, or the region you are traveling to on your next dive vacation.

Begin by imagining yourself standing on the shore with your wet suit on, but not quite zipped. As you calmly gather your gear together, express your excitement to your buddy about what you are about to see. See yourself zipping your wet suit and assembling your gear. As you and your buddy go through your pre-dive safety check, notice that everything is in order. As you walk from the bluff of the beach to the rocky entrance, feel your balance and your strength, and thank yourself for all that hard work in your yoga poses. As you and your

buddy walk knee-deep into the water, feel the coolness of the water soothe your skin. Keep your breath flowing: “inhale 1-2-3-4, exhale 4-3-2-1.”

You and your buddy calmly snorkel out to the dive site marked by a buoy. You encounter mild resistance, finning against the incoming tide, but with only a six-inch tidal exchange, you find it a simple task. As you and your buddy reach the buoy you look down to see the bottom visible through the clear turquoise water. Notice the waving palm tree branches and pink cottages of your resort as you take your land bearings. Smell the salt of the sea surrounding you. Keep your breath flowing: “inhale 1-2-3-4, exhale 4-3-2-1.”

After making your checks and noting the time, begin your descent. Visualize the color changes and feel the temperature changes as you break through the first few feet. Feel your ears release as you equalize and slowly make your way down the line. You can even physically smile as you face your buddy. Keep your breath flowing: “inhale 1-2-3-4, exhale 4-3-2-1.”

Find yourself coming to the reef and begin to observe the vast array of blues, purples, and other colors. Follow with your eyes tiny fish nibbling at the reef. Feel your hands clasp together; you don't need them to steady yourself because you're using your core muscles for that. Watch yourself begin to fin along the reef using long smooth, steady strokes, originating each stroke from your hip and maintaining a long torso. Keep your breath flowing: “inhale 1-2-3-4, exhale 4-3-2-1.”

As you watch yourself and your buddy gliding over the reef, moving away from shore, feel your mind and body at ease as you gradually descend with the reef. Witness the various shapes, sizes, and colors of the fish. Watch the multi-colored and multi-striped fish move around you with both casual observance and guarded optimism. Notice the brilliant color of a blue tang, or the humorous stripes of a sergeant major. See yourself float above giant brain coral, using your breath to fine-tune your buoyancy; watch the fan coral dance with the gentle currents. Keep your breath flowing: “inhale 1-2-3-4, exhale 4-3-2-1.”

Look with your mind at your depth and time and realize that you have reached the end of the dive. Since this is your first dive of the trip, and you wanted something uncomplicated, see yourself signaling to your buddy that it's time to turn around. Feel yourself maneuvering effortlessly under water and follow the contour of the reef back up to where you first descended. Stay calm and at ease, knowing you have plenty of air left because you kept the breath steady and calm. Keep your breath flowing: “inhale 1-2-3-4, exhale 4-3-2-1.”

View the line now coming in to focus. Feel the roughness of the rope against your palm as you grip the line to steady yourself. Visualize you and your

buddy ascending as calmly as you descended. See you and your buddy making a safety stop for a few minutes at 15 feet, bobbing gently in the water, watching the fish below. Finally, feel yourself slowly ascending and breaking through the surface of the water, the new-found breeze cooling your head. After fully inflating, take your last deep breath from your regulator and as you slowly exhale, switch to your snorkel. Watch how you effortlessly snorkel back into shore, with the waves now assisting you. Observe how you remove your fins when you reach knee-deep water and then carefully climb up onto the rocks, then back onto shore. Keep your breath flowing: “inhale 1-2-3-4, exhale 4-3-2-1.”

Smile internally, or even externally, as you imagine a calm and effortless dive. Gradually open your eyes. Make some notes in a journal about any thoughts that arose, or observations that occurred to you during your visualization.

## Visualization 2: Overcoming a difficulty

If you have been worried about a particular event under water, such as being low on air, you can try visualizing that event happening. Bring some focus to your breath, keep your breathing slow and steady as you visualize the event happening, and visualize yourself remaining calm and solving your problem under water. The more you can visualize yourself facing difficult challenges while remaining calm, the better prepared psychologically you will be for those challenges. We will place this second visualization in the same tropical surroundings as the first one.

Begin by imagining yourself on a boat with your wet suit on, but not quite zipped. As you calmly gather your gear together, express your excitement to your buddy about what you are about to see: this is your first wreck dive and you can't wait. Feel the warm Caribbean Sea breeze in your hair as you zip your wet suit and assemble your gear. As you and your buddy go through your pre-dive safety check, everything seems to be in order. Upon reaching the swim platform, you prepare by taking a calm rhythmic breath: “inhale 1-2-3-4, exhale 4-3-2-1.”

Witness how you secure your mask and regulator to your face and your other gear to your torso, and how you and your buddy complete simple giant strides off the boat. You can take a bird's eye view as you watch yourself signal to the boat that you are okay after establishing buoyancy, and as you snorkel to the line. See you and your buddy reach the mooring buoy and look down to see the wreck, a huge boat sitting at 80 feet, visible through the clear turquoise water. Notice the dive boat gently bobbing as you take your bearings. Smell the salt of the sea. Keep your breath flowing: “inhale 1-2-3-4, exhale 4-3-2-1.”