

22 Fascinating Facts About ASMR

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Flipping the pages of a book may trigger ASMR in some people. / Liudmila Chernetska/iStock via Getty Images Plus

Maybe you've seen one of the millions of videos devoted to ASMR on the internet, or perhaps you experience the brain tingles yourself. Here's what you need to know about the phenomenon, adapted from an episode of The List Show on YouTube.

1. The term *ASMR* was coined in a Facebook post.

In 2010, computer scientist Jennifer Allen came up with the initialism ASMR for "[autonomous sensory meridian response](#)," which doesn't have any official medical meaning. Most of the words Allen came up with make sense for the tingle sensation people get when they hear satisfying sounds.

2. In addition to a body tingle, people who experience ASMR report that it elicits feelings of pleasure and relaxation.

The tingle primarily occurs in the head but can venture lower in the body, too. People have [called the feeling](#) “brain tingles”.

3. A controversial way to describe ASMR is to compare it to musical frisson—the chills you get while listening to music.

This has been a helpful comparison for researchers to use as a jumping-off point over the years, but the ASMR community doesn't love it. On the ASMR subreddit wiki, it advises you to “direct your music videos to /r/Frisson or /r/ASMRmusic” and to learn the difference between musical frisson and ASMR.

4. Certain things trigger ASMR.

You're probably most familiar with ASMR YouTube videos (created by [ASMR-tists](#)) in which a person on screen speaks or performs actions in an attempt to cause a reaction in the viewer. There is a huge range of trigger sounds, including crinkling paper, folding towels, turning pages, tapping, whispering, and typing. There are also videos more focused on experiences, like sorting trading cards or roleplay in which the ASMR-tist pretends to be your doctor, hair stylist, or any number of other people.

5. There are four top triggers.

In the survey of 475 ASMR-experiencers, the researchers found the top four triggers in order were whispering, personal attention, crisp sounds—which

they define as “metallic foil, tapping fingernails, etc.”—and slow movements. As for why people used ASMR media, 98 percent claimed it was for relaxation, and 82 percent said it helped them fall asleep.

6. There are non-video ASMR triggers, too.

Even though we probably know it best from videos, the sensation happens in real life as well: Some people feel the response while getting a manicure or a haircut.

7. ASMR has only recently become a well-known phenomenon.

[Dr. Craig Richard](#), a professor of biopharmaceutical sciences at Shenandoah University, is one of the few legitimate experts on the subject. He wrote the book [Brain Tingles](#), which provides a history of the ASMR community.

According to Richard, it was a 2007 thread on the online forum SteadyHealth.com that triggered the conversation. After a user wrote “weird sensation feels good” and described ASMR, many people commented about how they could relate.

8. The first video meant to trigger ASMR debuted in 2009.

Richard’s history of ASMR in *Brain Tingles* also covers the YouTube scene. The [first video](#) meant to intentionally trigger ASMR—which featured a woman whispering, and of course predates the term—was uploaded to the channel WhisperingLife in March 2009.

9. More than 13 million ASMR videos have been uploaded to YouTube.

As of 2021, ASMR was the third most popular YouTube search of all time, [according to SEMRush](#). There are 10.8 million posts under the ASMR tag on

Instagram.

10. There haven't really been any conclusive studies on ASMR.

Only within the [past few years](#) has anyone begun to study the phenomenon, which is not enough time to create and replicate large research projects. A lot of the information we have about ASMR is self-reported by its community. A few studies do exist, but the information is very new and subject to change.

11. According to one study, participants with ASMR experience reduced heart rates.

One interesting ASMR study was published in 2018 in the journal [PLOS One](#). There were 110 participants, half who experienced ASMR and half who were controls. They watched videos (some ASMR, some not) while their heart rates were monitored. Participants with ASMR had a heart rate reduction of [3.41 beats per minute](#) after watching ASMR videos. According to the paper, that makes it about as effective as "music-based stress reduction" and more effective than "a mindfulness/acceptance based intervention for anxiety."

12. People with ASMR have reported that they can become desensitized to triggers over time.

In a survey conducted by Richard with 19,000 respondents, 40 percent claimed that they had become [desensitized to a trigger](#).

13. People who experience ASMR are more susceptible to misophonia, where sounds trigger negative responses.

Misophonia often manifests as a hatred for sounds made by human mouths. Scientists are looking into the connection between the two—one study [suggested that](#) "ASMR and misophonia represent two ends of the same

spectrum of sound sensitivity.”

14. You can attend live ASMR experiences.

One of them was [Whisperlodge](#), located in New York City, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Pre-COVID-19, one performer per guest would spend 90 minutes trying to give visitors brain tingles by whispering into ears, touching them with a brush, and creating many of the noises heard in ASMR YouTube videos.

15. ASMR has gone mainstream.

In 2019, a Michelob Ultra Super Bowl commercial starring Zoe Kravitz had her whispering and acting out other ASMR triggers, like tapping a Michelob bottle. The ad agency responsible for the spots even consulted with Craig Richard. Other companies that have created ASMR content include KFC, IKEA, Dove, and Ritz Crackers.

16. ASMR has been used in popular music.

In his 2014 song “Terrors in My Head,” Deadmau5 used a clip of Maria of the YouTube channel GentleWhispering saying, “Good morning to you,” among other things.

17. It's not easy to get into ASMR.

Maria (who keeps her last name private) was a [pioneer](#) in the world of ASMR-tists. In July 2017, she became [the first ASMR-tist](#) to reach 1 million YouTube subscribers. In a video, she described it as “a huge milestone not just for my channel, but for our whole ASMR community.”

But it’s not easy to just jump into this world. In interviews, she has described her process, which involves writing a script with the ideal sounding words, perfect microphone placement, and meticulous sound editing. Each video can

take up to three days to create. The website ASMR University has tips for aspiring artists, like how to record a perfect soft sound when there's background noise—which could include noise from the recording equipment itself. Unsurprisingly, this endeavor can cost money. They recommend having "a pop filter or foam wind screen."

18. Bob Ross can elicit ASMR.

Still, it's possible to create ASMR without trying to elicit brain tingles at all. [Bob Ross did](#). He's infamous in the community for his *Joy of Painting* content. It makes sense when you think about it: He talks straight to the viewer with a relaxing voice, plus there are all those lovely soft painting sounds. Happy little brain tingles!

19. There's an ASMR-inspired scene in the 2017 film *Battle of the Sexes*.

It's the scene where Billie Jean King meets her love interest, hairstylist Marilyn Barnett. Directors Valerie Faris and Jonathan Dayton [took that opportunity](#) to add ASMR-inducing sounds like scissors opening and closing, blow dryers, and whispers.

20. A major challenge for researchers who want to study the brains of people with ASMR is that MRI machines are loud, which hinders the ASMR experience.

Still, they're trying. In research [published](#) in 2017 in the journal *Social Neuroscience*, a group of Canadians studied brains at rest: 11 people with ASMR and 11 controls. Those with ASMR had less active connections between the brain's frontal lobe and sensory regions. To the researchers, this meant that maybe "ASMR reflects a reduced ability to inhibit sensory-emotional experiences that are suppressed in most individuals."

21. One study looked at correlations between ASMR and the Big Five personality traits.

One of the researchers from the *Social Neuroscience* study, associate professor Stephen Smith, also worked on a study in which 290 people with ASMR and 290 controls were given personality tests. The team looked for correlations between ASMR and the Big Five personality traits: openness-to-experience, neuroticism, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness. [They found that](#) people with ASMR had less of those last three—conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness—than a control group. But they tended to score higher in openness-to-experience and neuroticism.

22. ASMR isn't all innocent towel folding and painting.

There are some ASMR YouTube videos in which the artists act out kidnapping or murdering the viewer. The Mixed ASMR channel has a video that starts out like this: "Hello. Nice to meet you. If you haven't guessed so far this is a robbery and I'd like all your money, thanks. So, we could do this the easy way, or I could stab you."