

May and might 1

A

Study this example situation:

You are looking for Bob. Nobody is sure where he is, but you get some suggestions.

Where's Bob?

He **may** be in his office. (= perhaps he is in his office)

He **might** be having lunch. (= perhaps he is having lunch)

Ask Ann. She **might** know. (= perhaps she knows)

We use **may** or **might** to say that something is a possibility. Usually you can use **may** or **might**, so you can say:

- It **may** be true. *or* It **might** be true. (= perhaps it is true)
- She **might** know. *or* She **may** know.

The negative forms are **may not** and **might not** (*or mightn't*):

- It **may not** be true. (= perhaps it isn't true)
- She **might not** work here any more. (= perhaps she doesn't work here)

Study the structure:

I/you/he (etc.)	may might	(not)	be (true / in his office etc.) be (doing / working / having etc.) know / work / want etc.
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B

For the past we use **may have (done)** or **might have (done)**:

- A: I wonder why Kate didn't answer the phone.
B: She **may have been** asleep. (= perhaps she was asleep)
- A: I can't find my bag anywhere.
B: You **might have left** it in the shop. (= perhaps you left it in the shop)
- A: I was surprised that Kate wasn't at the meeting yesterday.
B: She **might not have known** about it. (= perhaps she didn't know)
- A: I wonder why David was in such a bad mood yesterday.
B: He **may not have been feeling** well. (= perhaps he wasn't feeling well)

Study the structure:

I/you/he (etc.)	may might	(not) have	been (asleep / at home etc.) been (doing / working / feeling etc.) known / had / wanted / left etc.
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C

Could is similar to **may** and **might**:

- It's a strange story, but it **could** be true. (= it may/might be true)
- You **could have left** your bag in the shop. (= you may/might have left it)

But **couldn't** (*negative*) is different from **may not** and **might not**. Compare:

- Sarah **couldn't have** got my message. Otherwise she would have replied.
(= it is not possible that she got my message)
- I wonder why Sarah hasn't replied to my message. I suppose she **might not have** got it.
(= perhaps she didn't get it, and perhaps she did)

29.1 Write these sentences in a different way using **might**.

- 1 Perhaps Helen is in her office. She might be in her office.
- 2 Perhaps Helen is busy. _____
- 3 Perhaps she is working. _____
- 4 Perhaps she wants to be alone. _____
- 5 Perhaps she was ill yesterday. _____
- 6 Perhaps she went home early. _____
- 7 Perhaps she had to go home early. _____
- 8 Perhaps she was working yesterday. _____

In sentences 9–11 use **might not**.

- 9 Perhaps she doesn't want to see me. _____
- 10 Perhaps she isn't working today. _____
- 11 Perhaps she wasn't feeling well yesterday. _____

29.2 Complete each sentence with a verb in the correct form.

- 1 'Where's Sam?' 'I'm not sure. He might be having lunch.'
- 2 'Who is that man with Emily?' 'I'm not sure. It might _____ her brother.'
- 3 A: Who was the man we saw with Anna yesterday?
B: I'm not sure. It may _____ her brother.
- 4 A: What are those people doing by the side of the road?
B: I don't know. They might _____ for a bus.
- 5 'Do you have a stamp?' 'No, but ask Simon. He may _____ one.'

29.3 Read the situation and make sentences from the words in brackets. Use **might**.

- 1 I can't find Jeff anywhere. I wonder where he is.
a (he / go / shopping) He might have gone shopping.
b (he / play / tennis) He might be playing tennis.
- 2 I'm looking for Sarah. Do you know where she is?
a (she / watch / TV / in her room) _____
b (she / go / out) _____
- 3 I can't find my umbrella. Have you seen it?
a (it / be / in the car) _____
b (you / leave / in the restaurant last night) _____
- 4 Why didn't Dave answer the doorbell? I'm sure he was at home at the time.
a (he / go / to bed early) _____
b (he / not / hear / the doorbell) _____
c (he / be / in the shower) _____

29.4 Complete the sentences using **might not have ...** or **couldn't have ...**.

- 1 A: Do you think Sarah got the message we sent her?
B: No, she would have contacted us. She couldn't have got it.
- 2 A: I was surprised Kate wasn't at the meeting. Perhaps she didn't know about it.
B: That's possible. She might not have known about it.
- 3 A: I wonder why they never replied to our letter. Do you think they received it?
B: Maybe not. They _____.
- 4 A: I wonder how the fire started. Was it an accident?
B: No, the police say it _____.
- 5 A: Mike says he needs to see you. He tried to find you yesterday.
B: Well, he _____ very hard. I was in my office all day.
- 6 A: The man you spoke to – are you sure he was American?
B: No, I'm not sure. He _____.

May and might 2

A

We use **may** and **might** to talk about possible actions or happenings in the future:

- I haven't decided yet where to go for my holidays. I **may** go to Ireland. (= perhaps I will go there)
- Take an umbrella with you. It **might** rain later. (= perhaps it will rain)
- The bus isn't always on time. We **might** have to wait a few minutes. (= perhaps we will have to wait)

The negative forms are **may not** and **might not (mightn't)**:

- Liz **may not** go out tonight. She isn't feeling well. (= perhaps she will not go out)
- There **might not be** enough time to discuss everything at the meeting. (= perhaps there will not be enough time)

Compare **will** and **may/might**:

- I'll **be** late this evening. (for sure)
- I **may/might** be late this evening. (possible)

B

Usually you can use **may** or **might**. So you can say:

- I **may** go to Ireland. *or* I **might** go to Ireland.
- Jane **might** be able to help you. *or* Jane **may** be able to help you.

But we use only **might (not may)** when the situation is *not real*:

- If I were in Tom's position, I **might** look for another job.

The situation here is not real because I am *not* in Tom's position (so I'm not going to look for another job). **May** is not possible in this example.

C

There is also a continuous form: **may/might be -ing**. Compare this with **will be -ing**:

- Don't phone at 8.30. I'll **be watching** the film on television.
- Don't phone at 8.30. I **might be watching (or I may be watching)** the film on television. (= perhaps I'll be watching it)

We also use **may/might be -ing** for possible plans. Compare:

- I'm **going** to Ireland in July. (for sure)
- I **may be going (or I might be going)** to Ireland in July. (possible)

But you can also say 'I **may go (or I might go) ...**' with little difference in meaning.

D

Might as well

Rose and Clare have just missed the bus. The buses run every hour.

What shall we do? Shall we walk?

We **might as well**. It's a nice day and I don't want to wait here for an hour.

We **might as well** do something = We should do it because there is no better alternative. There is no reason not to do it.

May as well is also possible.



- A: What time are you going out?
- B: Well, I'm ready, so I **might as well** go now.
- Buses are so expensive these days, you **may as well** get a taxi. (= taxis are as good, no more expensive)

30.1 Write sentences with **might**.

- Where are you going for your holidays? (to Ireland???)
I haven't decided yet. I might go to Ireland.
- What sort of car are you going to buy? (a Mercedes???)
I'm not sure yet. I _____
- What are you doing this weekend? (go to London???)
I haven't decided yet. _____
- When is Tom coming to see us? (on Saturday???)
He hasn't said yet. _____
- Where are you going to hang that picture? (in the dining room???)
I haven't made up my mind yet. _____
- What is Julia going to do when she leaves school? (go to university???)
She's still thinking about it. _____

30.2 Complete the sentences using **might** + the following:bite break need ~~rain~~ slip wake

- Take an umbrella with you when you go out. It might rain later.
- Don't make too much noise. You _____ the baby.
- Be careful of that dog. It _____ you.
- I don't think we should throw that letter away. We _____ it later.
- Be careful. The footpath is very icy. You _____.
- Don't let the children play in this room. They _____ something.

30.3 Complete the sentences using **might be able to** or **might have to** + a suitable verb.

- I can't help you, but why don't you ask Jane? She might be able to help you.
- I can't meet you this evening, but I _____ you tomorrow.
- I'm not working on Saturday, but I _____ on Sunday.
- I can come to the meeting, but I _____ before the end.

30.4 Write sentences with **might not**.

- I'm not sure that Liz will come to the party.
Liz might not come to the party.
- I'm not sure that I'll go out this evening.
I _____
- I'm not sure that we'll get tickets for the concert.
We _____
- I'm not sure that Sue will be able to come out with us this evening.

30.5 Read the situations and make sentences with **might as well**.

- You and a friend have just missed the bus. The buses run every hour.
You say: We'll have to wait an hour for the next bus. We might as well walk.
- You have a free ticket for a concert. You're not very keen on the concert, but you decide to go.
You say: I _____ to the concert. It's a pity to waste a free ticket.
- You've just painted your kitchen. You still have a lot of paint, so why not paint the bathroom too?
You say: We _____ . There's plenty of paint left.
- You and a friend are at home. You're bored. There's a film on TV starting in a few minutes.
You say: _____ There's nothing else to do.