

May and might 1

A

Study this example situation:

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

Where's Ben?

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 possible. 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 her phone.
B: She **may have been** asleep. (= perhaps she was asleep)
- A: I can't find my phone anywhere.
B: You **might have left** it at work. (= perhaps you left it at work)
- A: Why wasn't Amy 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 is possible that it's true)
- You **could have left** your phone at work. (= it's possible that you left it there)

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.
(= it's possible that she didn't get it – so perhaps she did, perhaps she didn't)

Exercises

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

- 1 Perhaps Helen is 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.

She might be in her office.

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 Ben?' 'I'm not sure. He might be having lunch.'
- 2 'Who is that man with Anna?' '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. I suppose they might _____ for a bus.
- 5 'Is Sarah here?' 'I can't see her. She may not _____ yet.'

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 Sophie. Do you know where she is?
 - a (she / watch / TV) _____
 - 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) _____
- 4 Why didn't Dan 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 I sent her?
B: No, she would have replied. She couldn't have got it
- 2 A: I was surprised Amy 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 haven't replied to the email I sent. 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 _____