

# 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 \_\_\_\_\_