

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?



YOU

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:

- 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**:

- It **might not** be true. (= perhaps it isn't true)
- I'm not sure whether I can lend you any money. I **may not** have enough. (= perhaps I don't have enough)

Study the structure:

I/you/he (etc.)	may might	(not)	be (wrong / in his office, etc.) be (doing/working/having, etc.) do/know/have/want, etc.
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B

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

- A: I wonder why Amy 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 store. (= perhaps you left it in the store)
- A: I was surprised that Sarah wasn't at the meeting.
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/waiting, etc.) done/known/had/seen, etc.
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C

Sometimes **could** has a similar meaning to **may** and **might**:

- The phone's ringing. It **could** be Matt. (= it may/might be Matt)
- You **could have left** your bag in the store. (= you may/might have left it there)

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

- He was too far away, so he **couldn't** have seen you. (= it is not possible that he saw you)
- A: I wonder why she didn't say hello.
B: She **might not have seen** you. (= perhaps she didn't see you; perhaps she did)

Exercises

28.1 Write these sentences in a different way using *may* or *might*.

- Perhaps Elizabeth is in her office. *She might be in her office. OR She may be ...*
- Perhaps Elizabeth is busy. _____
- Perhaps she is working. _____
- Perhaps she wants to be alone. _____
- Perhaps she was sick yesterday. _____
- Perhaps she went home early. _____
- Perhaps she had to go home early. _____
- Perhaps she was working yesterday. _____

In sentences 9–11, use *may not* or *might not*.

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

28.2 Complete the sentences with a verb in the correct form.

- A: Where's Bob? B: I'm not sure. He might *be having* _____ lunch.
- A: Who is that man with Anna?
B: I'm not sure. It might _____ her brother.
- A: Who was the man we saw with Anna yesterday?
B: I'm not sure. It might _____ her brother.
- A: What are those people doing on the sidewalk?
B: They might _____ for a bus.
- A: Should I buy this book for Sam?
B: You'd better not. He might already _____ it.

28.3 Read the situations and make sentences from the words in parentheses. Use *may* or *might*.

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

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

- A: Do you think she saw you?
B: No, she was too far away. *She couldn't have seen me.*
- A: I wonder why Ann didn't come to the party. Perhaps she wasn't invited.
B: Yes, it's possible. She _____.
- A: Tom loves parties. I'm sure he would have come to the party if he'd been invited.
B: I agree. He _____.
- A: I wonder how the fire started. Maybe it was an accident.
B: No, the police say it _____.
- A: How did the fire start? Do you think it was an accident?
B: Well, the police aren't sure. They say it _____.