

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)