

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.

You: 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 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 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 (true/in his office etc.)

I/you/he (etc.) may/might (not) be (doing/working/having etc.)

I/you/he (etc.) may/might (not) do/know/have/want etc.

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

* A: I wonder why Kay 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 Sarah wasn't at the meeting.

B: She might not have known about it. (= perhaps she didn't know)

* A: I wonder why Colin 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.)

I/you/he (etc.) may/might (not) have been (doing/waiting etc.)

I/you/he (etc.) may/might (not) have done/known/had/seen etc.

C. Sometimes could has a similar meaning to may and might:

* The phone's ringing. It could be Tim. (= it may/might be Tim)

* 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:

* She was too far away, so she couldn't have seen you. (= it is not possible that she 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

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

1. Perhaps Margaret is in her office. _She **might** be in her office._
 2. Perhaps Margaret 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 **may** not or **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.

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

1. 'Where's Bob?' 'I'm not sure. He **might** be having lunch.'
2. 'Who is that man with Ann?' 'I'm not sure. It might --- her brother.'
3. 'Who was the man we saw with Ann yesterday?' 'I'm not sure. It might --- her brother.'
4. 'Why are those people waiting in the street?' 'I don't know. They might --- for a bus.'
5. 'Shall I buy this book for Tim?' 'You'd better not. He might already --- it.'

3 Read the situations and make sentences from the words in brackets. Use **may** or **might**.

1. I can't find George anywhere. I wonder where he is.
a (he/go/shopping) He **may** have gone shopping.
b (he/play/tennis) He **might** be playing tennis.
2. I'm looking for Helen. 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 Tom answer the doorbell? I'm sure he was in the house at the time.
a (he/be/in the bath)
b (he/not/hear/the bell)

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

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

Answers

- 1.2. She may/might be busy
- 1.3. She may/might be working
- 1.4. She may/might want to be alone
- 1.5. She may/might have been ill yesterday
- 1.6. She may/might have gone home early
- 1.7. She may/might have had to go home early
- 1.8. She may/might have been working yesterday
- 1.9. She may/might not want to see me
- 1.10. She may/might not be working today
- 1.11. She may/might have been feeling yesterday

- 2.2. be
- 2.3. have been
- 2.4. be waiting
- 2.5. have or have read

- 3.2. a she may/might be watching TV in her room
b. she may/might have gone out
- 3.3. a it may/might be in the car
b. you may/might have left it in the restaurant last night
- 3.4. a He may/might have been in the bath
b. He may/might not have heard the bell

- 4.3. might not have been invited
- 4.4. couldn't have been invited
- 4.5. couldn't have been an accident
- 4.6. might not have been an accident