

# MAY and MIGHT: When do we use them?

Dear learner or mere visitor, welcome to our website!

Why don't you take a notebook and a pen to make the most out of this post? You will be more active this way and your time won't be wasted.

As you can see in the title, this is the third lesson in the **modal verbs** or **modal auxiliaries** [series](#).

## REMEMBER:

- There are 9 **modal verbs** in English: **Must, Can, Could, May, Might, Will, Would, Shall and Should**.
- **Modal verbs** are tools that help us to express modality. In fact, **modals** allow the speaker to express his or her point of view regarding an action, an event or a situation.
- **Modal verbs** always remain the same no matter the subject and cannot be conjugated.

Moreover, they do not have **present** and **past participles**. (I ~~am~~ **may**ing go./ I ~~have~~ **may**ed go.)

## MODAL VERB (MAY)

AFFIRMATIVE FORM					
I	You	He/She/It	We	You	They
<b>may</b>					

NEGATIVE FORM (FULL FORM)							
I	You	He	She	It	We	You	They
<b>may not</b> <b>mayn't</b>							

INTERROGATIVE FORM							
<b>May</b>							
I	you	he	she	it	we	you	they
<b>go?</b>							



## Step 1: Characteristics of MAY

- We use **MAY** in the present tense. (E.g. *You may go now.*)
- A verb stem always follows **MAY**. (E.g. *He may perform this afternoon.*) The verb stem is also known as the base of a verb. You can find examples of verb stems in the [dictionary](#).
- We do not add 'TO' after **MAY**. (E.g. *She may ~~to~~ come.*)
- **MAY** is able to replace auxiliary verbs such as **DO** and **BE** which help us to form questions. (E.g. *How may I help you?*)

## Step 2: Examples of MAY in the Affirmative Form (+)

### Expressing Possibility in the Present

Here, **MAY** refers to a situation that is possible in the present. Note that **BE**, **THINK** and **CONTAIN** are state or [stative](#) verbs.

- He may **be** sick.
- She may **think** that you are a fraud.
- The packet may **contain** peanuts.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **possibility** in the present using **MAY**.

### Expressing Possibility in the Future

Here, **MAY** refers to a situation that is possible in the future.

- He may come tomorrow.
- She may succeed in her project.
- You may become an English teacher one day. You never know!

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **possibility** in the future using **MAY**.

### Expressing Possibility in the Future in Zero Conditionals

This is when **MAY** is used to refer to an imaginary or hypothetical situation that is possible depending on the realisation of a prior action. Note that the verbs **REPAIR**, **TRAIN** and **COME** are in the present tense.

- I may go if you **repair** my car.
- He may win if he **trains** hard enough.
- We may stay up late if you **don't come** home earlier.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **possibility** in the future in zero conditionals using **MAY**.

### Expressing Possibility in the Past

As paradoxical as that sounds, **MAY + HAVE-EN/ED (Present Perfect)** can also be used to say that something was possible in the past. However, we are not certain that the situation or the action actually happened.

- He may have repaired my car.
- She may have talked to him by now.
- They may have done it.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **possibility** in the past using **MAY**.

### Giving Permission

In this case, we use **MAY** to tell someone that he or she is allowed to do something in the present. The context is formal.

- You may stand up.
- He may enter the office.
- They may smoke here.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you give someone **permission** in the present using **MAY**.

## Expressing Good Wishes

We can also use **MAY** to express hope and goodwill for ourselves or for another person.

- May you live a long life.
- Frankly speaking, may he succeed in all his endeavours.
- May we remain friends forever.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you give someone **permission** using **MAY**.

## Making Suggestions in the Present

**MAY** can be used to put forward an idea to someone so that he or she may consider it.

- You may want to use this way. It's safer.
- We may as well party all night.
- It may be a good idea to cut sugar from your diet.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which the subject makes **suggestions** in the present using **MAY**.

## Step 3: Examples of MAY in the Negative Form (-)

### Expressing Impossibility in the Present

In this context, we use **MAY + NOT** to talk about something that is not possible in the present. The chances are very low.

- He may not **be** sick.
- She may not **think** that I'm coming.
- The packet may not **contain** any peanuts.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **impossibility** in the present using **MAY + NOT**.

### Expressing Impossibility in the Future

Here, **MAY** refers to a situation that is impossible in the future.

- He may not come tomorrow.
- She may not succeed in her project.
- You may not become an English teacher. You have to be aware of that.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **impossibility** in the future using **MAY + NOT**.

### Expressing Impossibility in the Future in Zero Conditionals

This is when **MAY** is used to refer to an imaginary or hypothetical situation that is possible depending on the realisation of a prior action. Note that the verbs **REPAIR**, **TRAIN** and **DO** are in the present tense.

- I may not go if you **don't repair** my car.
- He may not win if he **doesn't train** hard enough.
- We may not stay up late if you **come** home earlier.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **impossibility** in the future in zero conditionals using **MAY + NOT**.

### Expressing Impossibility in the Past

**MAY + NOT + HAVE-EN/ED (Present Perfect)** can also be used to say that something was impossible in the past.

- He may not have repaired my car.
- She may not have talked to him by now.
- They may not have done it.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **impossibility** in the past using **MAY + NOT**.

### Expressing Prohibition

This is another usage of **MAY + NOT** in which the subject does not have permission to do something.

- You may not go out.
- They may not stay in this area.
- She may not smoke here.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **prohibition** in the present using **MAY + NOT**.

### Expressing Bad Luck

This is another usage of **MAY + NOT** in which the subject does not have permission to do something.

- May you not see the light of day.
- Honestly, may they not survive another week.

- May his car not make it on time.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **prohibition** in the present using **MAY + NOT**.

#### Step 4: Examples of MAY in the Interrogative Form(?)

##### Asking for Permission

Here, we use **MAY** to ask somebody if we can do something. In this case, the setting is formal like in a school, so people have to be very polite.

- May I go to the bathroom, teacher?
- May we stay here? Is it allowed?
- May they leave their stuff here?

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which the subject asks for **permission** from someone in the present using **MAY**.

##### Asking Questions in Conditional Sentences

Here, we use **MAY** to ask **WH-** or **Yes/NO** questions in hypothetical or unreal situations.

- What may happen if snow falls in the desert?
- May I come if I bring some cake?
- How may this affect me if I proceed to do it anyway?

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which the subject asks **WH-** or **Yes/No** questions in **conditional sentences** using **MAY**.

##### Asking for Information

In this case, **MAY** behaves like an auxiliary verb and helps us to form **WH-**questions. The questions are more formal and polite than when we use **CAN**.

- What may I do to make you feel happy?
- How may I help you?
- When may I come?

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which the subject asks for **information** in a formal and polite way using **MAY**.

### Making Requests

In this incident, the speaker **may** use **MAY** 😊 to ask something from someone.

- May I call you today?
- Jane, may I use your telephone?
- May we come with you?

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which the subject makes a **request** using **MAY**.

## MODAL VERB (MIGHT)

AFFIRMATIVE FORM					
I	You	He/She/It	We	You	They
<b>might</b>					

NEGATIVE FORM (FULL AND SHORT FORMS)							
I	You	He	She	It	We	You	They
<b>might not mightn't</b>							

INTERROGATIVE FORM							
<b>Might</b>							
I	you	he	she	it	we	you	they
<b>go?</b>							



### Step 5: Characteristics of MIGHT

- We use **MIGHT** as the past tense of **MAY**. (E.g. *He told me that he might come.*)
- We also use **MIGHT** in second conditionals. (E.g. *If I had a lot of money, I might buy a beautiful house by the lake.*) This past form of **MAY** is also called the unreal past because it refers to an unreal or hypothetical situation. However, note that the action 'buy a beautiful house' will happen in the **future**.

- A verb stem always follows **MIGHT**. (E.g. *It might contain peanuts.*) The verb stem is also known as the base of a verb. You can find examples of verb stems in the [dictionary](#).)
- We do not add '**TO**' after **MIGHT**. (E.g. *She might ~~to~~ be sick.*)
- **MIGHT** is able to replace auxiliary verbs such as **DO** and **BE** which help us to form questions. (E.g. *When might I get the vaccine?*)

## Step 6: Examples of MIGHT in the Affirmative Form (+)

### Expressing Possibility in the Present

Here, **MIGHT** refers to a situation that is possible in the present. With **MIGHT**, the event is less likely to happen than with **MAY** and **CAN**.

- He might be sick.
- She might think that you are a fraud.
- The packet might contain peanuts.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **possibility** in the present using **MIGHT**.

### Expressing Possibility in the Future

In this instance, **MIGHT** helps us to say that there is a chance that a situation can be realised in the future. The degree of probability is less than when we use **MAY** or **CAN**.

- I might come tomorrow.
- We might call you there.
- He might get COVID-19.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **possibility in the future** using **COULD**.

### Expressing Possibility in the Future in Second Conditional Sentences

In this case, we use **MIGHT** to refer to a hypothetical situation that is possible in the future, depending on the realisation of a previous action.

- If they were rich, they might buy a mansion with a swimming pool.
- I might stop living in the city, if I became famous.



- If they talked to him, he might give them the solutions to their problems.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **possibility in the future** in **conditional sentences** using **MIGHT**.

### Expressing Possibility in the Past

In this case, we use **MIGHT + HAVE-EN/ED (Present Perfect)** to say that a situation or an action was possible in the past but did not necessarily happen.

- He might have repaired my car.
- She might have talked to him by now.
- They might have done it.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **possibility** in the past using **MIGHT**.

### Making Suggestions in the Present

**MIGHT** is a good way of proposing an idea to someone in a tactful way.

- You might consider calling him first before you visit his office.
- We might as well eat the whole pizza.
- It might be a good idea to start doing sports regularly.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which the subject makes **suggestions** using **MIGHT**.

## Step 7: Examples of MIGHT in the Negative Form (-)

### Expressing Impossibility in the Present

In this context, we use **MIGHT + NOT** to refer to a situation that is very unlikely to happen in the present.

- He might not **be** sick.
- She might not **think** that you are a fraud.
- The packet might not **contain** any peanuts.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **impossibility** in the present using **MIGHT + NOT**.

### Expressing Impossibility in the Future

In this instance, we use **MIGHT + NOT** to say that a situation is impossible in the future.

- I might not come tomorrow.
- We might not call you there.
- He might not get COVID-19.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **impossibility in the future** using **MIGHT + NOT**.

### Expressing Impossibility in the Past in Third Conditionals

In this context, we use **MIGHT + NOT +HAVE-EN/ED (Present Perfect)** to talk about something that did not happen in the past but there was a possibility for its realisation if another action had been done.

- He might not have won, if luck had not been on his side.
- She might not have stayed, if you had stopped being kind to her.
- They might not have been accepted for the job, if they had come for the interview late.

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which you express **impossibility in the past in third conditionals** using **MIGHT + NOT +HAVE-EN/ED (Present Perfect)**.

### Step 8: Examples of MIGHT in the Interrogative Form(?)

#### Making Polite and Formal Requests

Here, **MIGHT** is used to ask someone for something in a polite and formal way.

- Might I take your temperature?
- Sir, might I see your passport?
- Might I call you on your mobile phone?

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which the subject makes polite and formal requests using **MIGHT**.

#### Asking for Information

In this case, **MIGHT** behaves like an auxiliary verb and helps us to form **WH**-questions. The questions are more formal and polite than when we use **MAY** and **CAN**.

- What might I do to make you feel happy?

- How might we change the situation?
- When might I come?

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which the subject asks for **information** in a formal and polite way using **MIGHT**.

### **Asking questions in Conditional Sentences**

In this case, we use **MIGHT** to form **WH-** and **Yes/No questions** in hypothetical or unreal situations.

- How might the pandemic affect travelling if the spread of the disease is not controlled?
- What might happen if he comes today?
- Who might answer the letter if they write to us?

**Your Turn:** Make 3 sentences in which the subject asks for **information** in **conditional sentences** using **MIGHT**.

### **Asking for Permission**

It is also possible for you to use **MIGHT** to ask someone if you can do something in a very formal context.

- Might I borrow your book?
- Might we enter the room?
- Madam, might I ask you a question, please?

**Your Turn:** Make sentences in which the subject asks for permission in a very formal context using **MIGHT**.

