


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 Kate. She **might** know. (= perhaps she knows)

We use **may** or **might** to say that something is possible. You can use **may** or **might**:

- ☐ 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 **may not** be true. (= perhaps it isn't true)
- ☐ She **might not** know. (= perhaps she doesn't know)

| | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------|-------|---|
| I/you/he (etc.) | may might | (not) | be (true / in his office etc.) be -ing (doing / working / having etc.) know / work / want etc. |
|-----------------|----------------------------|-------|---|

Note the difference between **may be** (2 words) and **maybe** (1 word):

- ☐ It **may be** true. (**may** + verb)
- ☐ 'Is it true?' '**Maybe**. I'm not sure.' (**maybe** = it's possible, perhaps)

B

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

- ☐ 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)

| | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------|------------|---|
| I/you/he (etc.) | may might | (not) have | been (asleep / at home etc.) been -ing (doing / working / feeling etc.) known / had / wanted / left etc. |
|-----------------|----------------------------|------------|---|

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 received** my message. Otherwise she would have replied.
(= it is not possible that she got my message)
- ☐ Why hasn't Sarah replied to my message? I suppose she **might not have received** it.
(= it's possible that she didn't receive it – perhaps she did, perhaps she didn't)

Exercises

29.1 Complete the sentences. Choose from the box.

- 1 A: Do you know where Helen is?
B: I'm not sure. She might be in her room.
- 2 A: Is there a bookshop near here?
B: I'm not sure, but ask Anna. She
- 3 A: Where are those people from?
B: I don't know. They
- 4 A: I hope you can help me.
B: I'll try, but it
- 5 A: Whose phone is this?
B: It's not mine. It
- 6 A: Why doesn't George answer his phone?
B: He
- 7 A: Do you know anyone who has a key to this cupboard?
B: Rachel, but I'm not sure.
- 8 A: Gary is in a strange mood today.
B: Yes, he is. He

may be Tom's
may not be feeling well
may not be possible
~~might be in her room~~
might be Brazilian
might be driving
might have one
might know

29.2 Complete each sentence using the verb in brackets.

- 1 A: Where's Ben?
B: I'm not sure. He might be having lunch. (have)
- 2 A: Who was the guy we saw with Anna yesterday?
B: I'm not sure. It may her brother. (be)
- 3 A: Is Ellie here?
B: I can't see her. She may not yet. (arrive)
- 4 A: Gary said he would meet us in the cafe, but he isn't here.
B: He might outside. I'll go and look. (wait)
- 5 A: How did John know that I'd lost my job?
B: I don't know. I suppose Sam may him. (tell)
- 6 A: Do you know where Jeff is? Is he still in the office?
B: He was here earlier, but he might home. (go)
- 7 A: Where's Emma? What's she doing?
B: I'm not sure. She might TV. (watch)
- 8 A: Does Max have any brothers or sisters?
B: I'm not sure. I think he may a younger sister. (have)
- 9 A: I can't find my umbrella. Have you seen it?
B: You may it in the restaurant last night. (leave)
- 10 A: I rang Dan's doorbell, but he didn't answer. I'm sure he was there.
B: He might not the doorbell. (hear)
- 11 A: Hannah is supposed to meet us here, and she's already 20 minutes late.
B: She may She's always forgetting things. (forget)

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

- 1 A: I was surprised Amy wasn't at the meeting. Perhaps she didn't know about it.
B: Maybe. She might not have known about it.
- 2 A: I wonder why Tom didn't come to the party. Perhaps he didn't want to come.
B: It's possible. He to come.
- 3 A: I wonder how the fire started. Was it an accident?
B: No, the police say it an accident. It was deliberate.
- 4 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.
- 5 A: The man you spoke to – are you sure he was American?
B: No, I'm not sure. He