

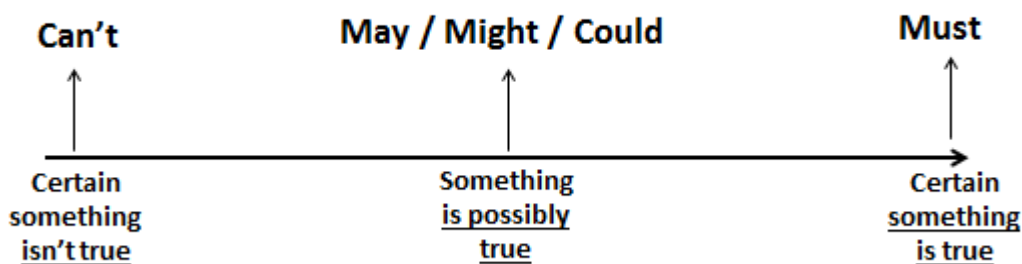
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We can use modal verbs to talk about *possibility* or to *express uncertainty* in the present and future using modal verbs **may**, **might** and **could**.

Some suggest that '*might*' is less certain than '*may*', but in spoken English there is really no difference. However, '*might*' is more common in spoken English. The word '*may*' is less common, and we can only use '*could*' in the positive form, not the negative form, for talking about possibility.

Here's how '*may*', '*might*' and '*could*' relate to other modal verbs of probability:



via

<https://ayearinthelifeoffice.wordpress.com/2013/11/28/modal-verbs-of-certainty-and-possibility/>

Thus, we use '*may*', '*might*' and '*could*' when we think that something is possible.

Statements with *'may'*, *'might'* and *'could'* can refer to past, present, or future possibilities.

Present possibility

To refer to present possibility, use:

May / Might / Could + the verb (base form without 'to')

- *Look at Jack! He **might be** in a hurry to meet with Catherine.*
- *The clouds cover the top of the mountain. It **might be** windy there.*
- *Don't eat that mushroom. It **could** be poisonous.*

Past possibility

Positive possibilities

When talking about past positive possibilities, use:

May / Might / Could + have + [Past Participle](#)

Note: For regular verbs, this is the **"-ed"** form of the verb. For the list of Past Participle forms of irregular verbs see our article on [irregular verbs](#).

- *I can't find my pen. I **might have dropped** it earlier.*
- *The person who stole the money **could have been** one of the employees.*
- *He **may have misunderstood** you when you talked to him yesterday.*

'*Could have*' is usually used in unreal conditions - when we are imagining a possibility if something in the past had been different:

- *If we had started this project earlier, we **could have** finished on time.*

Negative possibilities

To refer to future possibility, use:

May / Might / Could + the verb (base form without 'to') + future time marker

- *John's not here. He **might not have known** about the meeting.*
- *If she hasn't called you back, she **may not have listened** to your voicemail yet.*

Note that 'couldn't have' is only used when we are certain that something is *impossible* in the past:

- *She **couldn't have** taken the car; she doesn't have a key.*

Future possibility

To refer to future possibility, use:

May / Might / Could + the verb (base form without 'to') + future time marker

- *It's cold outside. It **may snow** later on.*
- *Joe **might come** to our party next weekend.*
- *Your daughter is really smart. She **could be** very successful someday.*

Here's a good video from Oxford Online English explaining how to use 'can', 'may', 'might' and 'could' to express possibility:

Read more on modal verbs:

[Modal Verbs: Overview](#)

[Modal Verbs for Deduction](#)

[Modal Verbs for Obligations](#)