

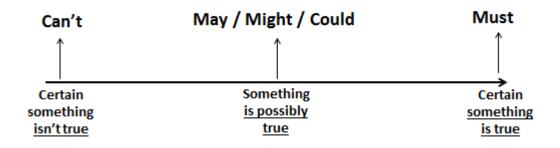
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- Thus, we use 'may', 'might' and 'could' when we think that something is possible. Statements with 'may', 'might' and 'could' can refer to past, present, or future possibilities.
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We can use modal 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:



 $via \\ https://ayear in the life of fce. word press. com/2013/11/28/modal-verbs-of-certainty-and-possibility/$

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 <u>irregular verbs</u>.

- 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