

# Modals of Possibility

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# Grammar Notes

## A. Introduction to Modals

**Modals** (also known as modal verbs) are words that come before the main verb. They give the verb an extra meaning, such as *ability, advice, or possibility*.

Modals are always followed by a **base verb**.  
A base verb is a verb with no ending (-s, -ed, -ing, etc.) added to it.

Look at the following chart to see examples of different types of modals.

Modals	Type	Example
<b>can/could</b>	ability	I <b>can</b> speak three languages.
<b>should</b>	advice	You <b>should</b> study more often.
<b>must</b>	necessity	He <b>must</b> apply for the job by Friday.
<b>might/could/may</b>	possibility	She <b>might</b> go to the movies tonight.

## Grammar Notes cont.

### B. Modals of Possibility

Modals of possibility show that something is **possible now**.  
They can also show that something **might happen in the future**.

Modals of possibility include *might*, *could*, and *may*.  
These modals all have the meaning of "possible" and "maybe."  
*Might* and *could* are very common. *May* is more formal and not used as often.

	Positive Sentences	Negative Sentences	Questions
<b>might</b>	✓ Alia <b>might</b> go to the party.	✓ Alia <b>might not</b> go to the party.	✗ (not common)
<b>could</b>	✓ Juan <b>could</b> be late.	✗ (not common)	✓ <b>Could</b> Juan be late?
<b>may</b>	✓ They <b>may</b> buy a new car.	✓ They <b>may not</b> buy a new car.	✗ (not common)

#### Note #1

*Could not* is almost always used to show past ability, not present or future possibility.

- Lisa **could not** go to the party.  
(Past ability = She didn't go to the party.)
- Lisa **might not** go to the party.  
(Future possibility = She's not sure if she will go to the party or not.)

#### Note #2

The adverb *maybe* is often used to show possibility. We usually use *maybe* at the beginning or end of a sentence. Compare the adverb *maybe* with the modal *may*.

- **Maybe** he is sick today.
- He **may** be sick today.
- **Maybe** they have a cat.
- They **may** have a cat.

## Exercise 1

### FILL IN THE BLANKS

Write *might*, *could*, or *may* in the sentences below to show possibility.  
More than one answer might be possible.

Ex. Mina \_\_\_\_\_ *might* \_\_\_\_\_ help me with my homework.

1. John and Amy \_\_\_\_\_ get a new kitten.
2. I \_\_\_\_\_ study Japanese next year.
3. Pavel \_\_\_\_\_ try out for hockey next year.
4. Daniel \_\_\_\_\_ not go to school because he's sick.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ she be our new teacher?
6. We \_\_\_\_\_ try this new restaurant tonight.
7. Louise and Pierre \_\_\_\_\_ get married in the spring.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ that be our bus?
9. They \_\_\_\_\_ not be ready to take the test.
10. Isabella \_\_\_\_\_ not join the basketball team this year.

## Exercise 2

### OUR TRIP

Imagine that you and your partner are taking a trip together soon. Decide where you want to go. Then write down one or two possible plans for each day using modals of possibility.

#### Example

**Destination:** Paris


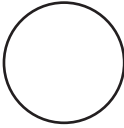
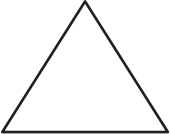
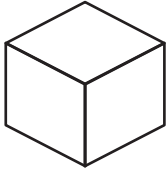

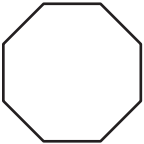
**Monday:** We might go to the Eiffel Tower if it's sunny.  
If it rains, we could go to the Louvre and see the Mona Lisa.

<b>Destination</b>	
<b>Monday</b>	
<b>Tuesday</b>	
<b>Wednesday</b>	
<b>Thursday</b>	
<b>Friday</b>	
<b>Saturday</b>	
<b>Sunday</b>	

### Exercise 3

#### WHAT COULD IT BE?

Look at the images. With a partner, come up with some guesses about what each image might be. Use *might*, *could*, or *may* in each sentence.

#	Image	What could this be?
Ex		<p><i>It could be an envelope.</i></p> <p><i>It might be a wide-screen TV.</i></p>
1		<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
2		<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
3		<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
4		<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
5		<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

## Exercise 4

### GUESSING GAME

Close your eyes. You have one minute to draw a picture with your eyes closed. When you are finished, get into groups of four. Each group member must use a modal of possibility to make a guess about what you drew.

#### Example

Nicolas: Here's my picture. What could it be?

Hye Jin: Well, it could be a snake.

Anya: Or it might be spaghetti.

Akiko: Could it be a river?

Nicolas: Anya is right. It's spaghetti!

## Exercise 5

### MY POSSIBLE FUTURE

What are your possible future plans and goals? Check all that could apply to you, and think of two more things to add to the list. Then find a partner and talk about future possibilities using *might*, *could*, or *may*.

- graduate
- get a new job
- get married
- have children
- get a new pet
- buy a new home
- start a new hobby
- make new friends
- become fluent in English
- learn another language besides English
- travel
- retire
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



## Exercise 6

### QUIZ

Find one error in each sentence.

Ex. She might coming to the concert with us.

*She might come to the concert with us.*

---

1. If I finish my assignment, I go could home early.

---

2. Hiro might calls you tomorrow.

---

3. My teacher could not give us homework to do this weekend. We'll find out on Friday.

---

4. May that be a UFO?

---

5. He might gets a new puppy.

---

6. We could not go out tonight. We haven't decided yet.

---

7. They may moving to another city next year.

---

8. Fatima might takes a year off school to travel around the world.

---

9. My children maybe absent from school tomorrow.

---

10. Francisco isn't in class today. May he be sick?

---

# Answer Key

### LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson, students learn to use *might*, *could*, and *may* in affirmative sentences, negative sentences, and questions. Students guess at each other's drawings and discuss future travel and life plans.

**LEVEL:** Int

**TIME:** 2 hours

**TAGS:** modals, modals of possibility, might, could, may, maybe, possible, modal verbs, auxiliary verbs, verbs, grammar

## Exercise 1

- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. might / could / may | 6. might / could / may |
| 2. might / could / may | 7. might / could / may |
| 3. might / could / may | 8. Could               |
| 4. might / may         | 9. might / may         |
| 5. Could               | 10. might / may        |

## Exercise 2

Answers will vary.

## Exercise 3

Answers will vary. Possible answers:

- It could be a plate. / It might be the moon.
- It might be a pyramid. / It could be a hat.
- It might be a die. / It may be a box.
- It could be a ladder. / It might be a pair of skis.
- It might be a stop sign. / It could be a picture frame.

## Exercise 4

Answers will vary.

## Exercise 5

Answers will vary. Encourage conversation by getting students to ask each other some follow-up questions. You could also try setting a time limit. (E.g., *You must talk to each other for at least ten minutes during this exercise.*)

## Exercise 6

Answers may vary.

- If I finish my assignment, I **could go** home early.
- Hiro might **call** you tomorrow.
- My teacher **might/may** not give us homework to do this weekend. We'll find out on Friday.
- Could** that be a UFO?
- He might **get** a new puppy.
- We **might/may** not go out tonight. We haven't decided yet.
- They may **move** to another city next year.
- Fatima might **take** a year off school to travel around the world.
- My children **may be** absent from school tomorrow.
- Francisco isn't in class today. **Could** he be sick?

### EDITOR'S NOTE:

This lesson shows the common North American usage of modals of possibility. Variations may occur in other English-speaking countries.