



“May” and “might”

Every month in this section, ROBERT PARR uses notes on a short text to present and explain a key point of grammar.

easy plus

Peter is ringing David. Diana picks up the phone.

Peter: Hi, Diana! This is Peter.
Diana: Oh, hello, Peter!
Peter: Is David there, please?
Diana: I'm not sure, to be honest. He **may be** in the garden. He wanted to mow the lawn (*den Rasen mähen*). One second, please.

(Thirty seconds later)

Diana: No, sorry, he's not here. He **may have nipped** up (UK: *schnell runtergehen*) the road to get a paper.
Peter: OK.
Diana: Or he **might be doing** something in the garage. I don't really know.
Peter: Well, he may be able to help me with something here, so it'd be great if he could give me a ring.
Diana: All right. I'll tell him you called.
Peter: Actually, you **might be** able to help me. My sister's got a problem with her computer. She can receive e-mails, but she can't send them and...
Diana: Me and computers? I'm what you **might call** a complete novice ['nɒvɪs] (*Anfänger(in)*).

One common use of **may** and **might** is to talk about possibility. Here, **may** can be replaced by **could**.

May (or **might**) can be combined with “have” and the past participle to talk about past possibility.

There are lots of fixed expressions with **may** and **might** in spoken English (see below).

Might (or **may**) combines with “be” and “-ing” to say that something is possibly happening at the present time.

Might expresses a less likely possibility than **may**.

Remember!

May and **might** have many functions. Here are some examples:

- **Request:** May I use the phone?
- **Advice:** Seats **may be** reserved in advance.
- **Criticism:** You **might have** told me that you're busy tonight.

Beyond the basics

Here are some common expressions with **may** and **might**.

- I **might have guessed** (*ich hätte mir eigentlich denken können*) that they wouldn't help clear up after the party.
- Drinking beer is good for you? **If I may say so** (*wenn ich das mal so sagen darf*), that's a load of rubbish.
- **You might as well** (*Du kannst genauso gut*) stay here for the weekend. Staying at a hotel is so expensive.

Exercise

Which sentence comes next — 1 or 2?

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| a) He left his keys on the kitchen table this morning.
1. He may mean to leave them. | 2. He may have meant to leave them. |
| b) Don't bother waiting for them.
1. They might be a bit late. | 2. They might have been a bit late. |
| c) Is John around?
1. He may have worked in the garden. | 2. He might be working in the garden. |
| d) There's nothing on television tonight.
1. We might possibly go to bed. | 2. We might as well go to bed. |

a) ☐

b) ☐

c) ☐

d) ☐

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