



MODAL VERB “MAY”

May is used exactly the same way as “**might**” is used when talking about a possibility.

They **may** pass the test, they studied for it for a long time.

He **may** be at home, he said he wasn’t going anywhere.

They **may** travel to Africa next year.

As with “**might**”, “**may**” is used in the above examples to indicate a possibility of each of the situations.

The negative form of “**may**” is also used exactly the same way that “**might not**” is used. It emphasizes more doubt for the situation.

They **may not** pass the test, they didn’t study that hard for it.

He **may not** be at home, he said he might have to go to a meeting.

They **may not** travel to Africa next year, they might not get enough time off from work.

The formula when using “might” or “may” as a possibility is as follows:

SUBJECT	+ MIGHT/MAY	+ VERB IN INFINITIVE FORM	+ COMPLEMENTIZER
I	might	go	to the store.
You	might	see	your friend soon.
He	may	call	her later.
She	may	be	in Detroit now.
It	might	get	dark soon.
We	might	eat	at Sam’s, we are not sure.
They	may	come	to the picnic.

“**MAY**” is also used when asking for formal permission. The request is usually for a person in authority such as an official, boss, or older relative. It’s commonly used in very polite requests.

Examples:

Request: Mother, **may** I go to the movies with Gabriela after dinner?

Answer: Yes you **may**.

Request: Sir, **may** I see you for a couple of minutes?

Answer: Certainly, what can I do for you?

Request: Officer, **may** we ask you a couple of questions?

Answer: Sure, what do you need to know?

Request: **May** I ask you a question, are you married or single?

Answer: No, it’s none of your business.

Note: we also use May when we request permission to do something.

May we come in?

Mommy, **may** I go to the bathroom?

Sir, **may** we leave the office a little early?

May I be excused from the meeting for a few minutes?



Read the following sentences carefully and determine if the modal verb “May” is being used to request for permission politely or show a remote possibility of something happening.

1. Professor Smith, May I talk to you after class?
A. Possibility B. Permission
2. We may go to Europe next summer.
A. Possibility B. Permission
3. Sir. May I see your driver’s license?
A. Possibility B. Permission
4. The economy may recover next year.
A. Possibility B. Permission
5. May I talk to you outside?
A. Possibility A. Permission
6. Take your umbrella with you. It may rain later.
A Possibility B. Permission
7. Mom!! May I go out with my friends?
A. Possibility B. Permission
8. May I take your order sir?
A. Possibility B. Permission
9. I am sorry I am late. May I come in?
A. Possibility B. Permission
10. If you don’t change your lateness habits, you may not have your job next year.
A. Possibility B. Permission
11. May I have your passport?
A.Possibility B. Permission
12. I may not be able to finish the job today.
A.Possibility B. Permission
13. You may kiss the bride now.
A.Possibility B. Permission

14. Richard may be sick. He wasn't feeling well yesterday.
A. Possibility B. Permission
15. May I ask you a personal question?
A. Possibility B. Permission
16. The boss said that if the company does well this year, we may get a substantial rate.
A. Possibility B. Permission
17. You may be right or you may be wrong. We'll find out soon.
A. Possibility B. Permission
18. My nephew is coming to visit us in New York this summer, and he said that he may stay with us while he is here.
A. Possibility B. Permission
19. May I use your laptop? I didn't bring mine.
A. Possibility B. Permission
20. You may take those books with you if you like them.
A. Possibility B. Permission