

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
can/could	ability	I can speak three languages.
should	advice	You should study more often.
must	necessity	He must apply for the job by Friday.
might/could/may	possibility	She might 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
might	✓ Alia might go to the party.	✓ Alia might not go to the party.	✗ (not common)
could	✓ Juan could be late.	✗ (not common)	✓ Could Juan be late?
may	✓ They may buy a new car.	✓ They may not 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.