

GRAMMAR · LESSON 12 · B1

The sky **may** clear. It **might** snow instead. We **could** see the Northern Lights.

Possibility: may, might, could — three shades of "maybe"

Three modals for talking about what is **possible** but **not certain**. Plus: **must** and **can't** for when you are certain — the deduction trick that ties back to Lesson 11.

🕒 50 min

📌 Possibility

📌 CEFR B1

📌 Ages 11-16

What you'll learn

- Use **may / might / could** for uncertain present and future events.
- Place modals on the **certainty scale**: must/can't (deduction) vs may/might/could (guessing).
- Form past possibility with **may/might/could + have + V3** and past deduction with **must have / can't have + V3**.

1

WARM-UP · 4 MIN

What might happen next?

- | | |
|----|---|
| Q1 | What might you do this weekend? (Two possibilities.) |
| Q2 | Look outside. What could the weather do in the next two hours? |
| Q3 | Your friend hasn't replied. What may be the reason? |
| Q4 | Teacher is 10 min late: she must be stuck (sure) vs she might be in a meeting (guess). What's the difference? |

2

GRAMMAR FOCUS · 18 MIN

Three shades of "maybe"

When you are not certain about something, English gives you three modals. They all mean 'it is **possible**,' but they carry slightly different tones.

<p style="text-align: center;">MAY</p> <p style="text-align: center;">may + base verb</p> <p>Possibility — neutral, slightly formal.</p> <p><i>It may rain this afternoon.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">MIGHT</p> <p style="text-align: center;">might + base verb</p> <p>Possibility — very common in everyday speech.</p> <p><i>She might come to the party.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">COULD</p> <p style="text-align: center;">could + base verb</p> <p>Possibility + suggestions. Context matters (also = past ability).</p> <p><i>We could take the coast road.</i></p>
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In practice: for B1, **may**, **might**, and **could** are *interchangeable* for present and future possibility. The difference is tone and register, not meaning.

⚠ **The certainty scale — from "maybe" to "I'm sure"**

MUST be	Almost certain (positive): "He must be tired. He ran a marathon."
CAN'T be	Almost certain (negative): "She can't be 60. She looks 40."
MAY / MIGHT / COULD	Possible (50/50): "He might be at the gym." (= maybe, maybe not.)
MAY NOT / MIGHT NOT	Possible negative: "She might not come." (= it is possible she won't.)

Key: *couldn't* for deduction = **impossible** (like *can't*). It does NOT mean 'less possible'. Don't confuse it with *could* (= maybe).

↳ **Past possibility and other uses**

PAST POSS.	may / might / could + have + V3 — something possible in the past, uncertain. <i>She might have missed the bus. He may have forgotten.</i>
PAST DEDUCT.	must have + V3 (almost certain it happened). can't have + V3 (almost certain it didn't). <i>He must have left early. She can't have seen me.</i>
PERMISSION	May I...? = formal way to ask permission. Can I...? = more common. <i>May I open the window? (formal)</i>
SUGGESTIONS	could is often used for suggestions — 'here is one option.' <i>We could try the new restaurant on Market Street.</i>
L11 BRIDGE	must for deduction vs obligation: same word, different function. 'He must be the new teacher' = certainty. <i>Quiz Q9 from L11: 'He must have left it on the kitchen table.'</i>

△ Three classic B1 mistakes

□ ~~It can rain later.~~ □ **It may / might / could rain later.** (For uncertain future, use may/might/could, not 'can'.)

□ ~~She mights come.~~ □ **She might come.** (Modals never take -s.)

□ ~~He could not be so tall.~~ □ **He can't be so tall.** (For 'impossible' deduction, use can't, not could not.)

3

KEY VOCABULARY · 6 MIN

Ten words for guessing and wondering

Word	POS	Meaning	Example
possible	<i>adj</i>	able to happen; not certain	<i>It's possible that we'll see snow.</i>
likely	<i>adj</i>	probably going to happen	<i>Rain is likely tomorrow afternoon.</i>
unlikely	<i>adj</i>	probably not going to happen	<i>It's unlikely that he'll agree.</i>
certain	<i>adj</i>	100% sure	<i>I'm certain the shop closes at 6.</i>
to predict	<i>v</i>	to say what you think will happen	<i>Scientists predict warmer winters.</i>
forecast	<i>n/v</i>	a statement about what will happen (esp. weather)	<i>The forecast says it might clear up.</i>
to wonder	<i>v</i>	to think about something you are not sure about	<i>I wonder if the bus might be late.</i>
perhaps	<i>adv</i>	maybe; possibly	<i>Perhaps we could try a different route.</i>
evidence	<i>n</i>	facts or signs that show something is true or likely	<i>There's evidence she may have left early.</i>
to estimate	<i>v</i>	to make a rough guess about a number	<i>I'd estimate there could be 200 people.</i>

4

READING · 12 MIN

The Sky Might Clear

THE PULSE · ISSUE 14

ONE WEEK OF WEATHER AND WONDER

The Sky *Might* Clear

Yara, 15, has never seen the Northern Lights. A week-long school science trip to Iceland's south coast might change that — if the clouds cooperate. Plus four more teens whose lives are shaped by "maybe."

Y

Yara, 15

Reykjavik · Iceland

"It might clear tonight. It may not. Nobody knows."

On Monday morning, standing outside a guesthouse near Skogafoss, Yara looked up at a grey sky and said what everyone on the trip was thinking: "It **might** clear tonight. It **may** not. Nobody knows." That was the first lesson Iceland taught her — not about geology, but about the grammar of uncertainty. In Reykjavik, where she lives, people talk about the weather in the language of *may, might, and could*.

Their science teacher, Mr Sigurdsson, explained it on the bus. "When I say 'it **might** snow,' I am saying it is possible but I am not sure. When I say 'it **may** snow,' I am saying essentially the same thing, maybe a little more carefully. And when I say 'it **could** snow,' I am opening a door — here is one thing that could happen." He paused. "But when I say 'it **must** be below zero,' I am not guessing any more. I am making a **deduction**." (*Notice the shift: may/might/could = guessing. Must = deducing from evidence. That is the certainty scale.*)

On Thursday night, the teacher changed his language. "That green shimmer — that **must** be the aurora." And it was. The Northern Lights appeared at 11:20 p.m. Yara whispered: "That **must** be the most beautiful thing I have ever seen." Katrin nodded. "It **can't** be real."

The next morning, Yara reflected. "We **could have missed** the Lights completely. We **might have gone** home without seeing anything. The weather **may have changed** an hour later and hidden everything." In English, that is how you talk about past possibilities: **could/might/may + have + past participle**.

... FOUR MORE LIVES OF "MAYBE" ...

T

Tomás, 14 · Mexico City · Mexico

Earthquakes

"Scientists say a big one **could** happen any year. We **might** feel a tremor tonight, or we **may** not feel anything for months." After a small tremor: "That **must** have been a 4.0."

S Suki, 15 · Osaka · Japan

Sakura

"The blossoms **could** peak this weekend. But it **might** be earlier if the temperature stays warm."
Last year: "**I might have seen** them on Sunday, but I had a volleyball match."

L Liam, 13 · Dublin · Ireland

GAA match

"We **could** win if Cian plays well. But their goalkeeper **might** block everything." After the loss:
"We **could have won** if I hadn't missed that free. That **must** have been the hardest loss of the season."

A Amara, 14 · Nairobi · Kenya

Safari

The guide said: "We **might** see elephants. We **could** also spot a leopard." When the leopard didn't appear: "She **must** be sleeping. **She might** come out at sunset." At 6 p.m., she did.

may (neutral)**might**
(everyday)**could** (open
poss.)**must/can't** (deduction)

5

PRACTICE · 8 MIN

8 quick choices

Choose the correct option (A, B or C). Answers on the last page.

1	Take an umbrella — it ____ rain later. · A) can B) must C) might
2	He's been running all day. He ____ be exhausted. · A) must B) might C) could
3	She ____ be 50 years old — she looks 30! · A) must B) can't C) might
4	Where's Mia? She ____ be in the library — I'm not sure. · A) must B) can't C) could
5	I can't find my keys. I ____ have left them at the restaurant. · A) must B) might C) can
6	The lights are off. They ____ have gone to bed already. · A) must B) may C) can
7	We ____ go to the beach tomorrow, but it depends on the weather. · A) must B) could C) can't
8	She ____ come to the party — she said she has to work. · A) may B) must C) might not

6

SPEAKING · 5 MIN

The world of "maybe"

Q 1	Friend absent: three reasons using might/may/could.
Q 2	Loud noise outside: what could it be? What must it be?
Q 3	Your life in ten years: three might-possibilities.
Q 4	Teacher smiling with a box: what could be inside?
Q 5	Something that almost didn't happen: could have / might have.

8

COMPREHENSION QUIZ · 6 MIN

10 questions — let's see what stuck

1	It ___ snow tonight — the forecast says 50% chance. · A) can B) must C) might D) can't
2	She's been studying all day. She ___ be tired. · A) might B) must C) could D) may not
3	That ___ be Sarah — Sarah is in New York this week. · A) must B) might C) can't D) may
4	He ___ have forgotten about the meeting — he's usually reliable. · A) might B) must C) can D) will
5	The restaurant ___ be full on Saturday — we should book. · A) must B) can C) could D) can't
6	Look at those dark clouds. It ___ rain any minute now. · A) might not B) can C) must D) couldn't
7	We ___ have taken the wrong road — this doesn't look right. · A) should B) must C) couldn't D) may
8	She ___ be the new manager — she started only last week. · A) must B) can't C) might D) may not
9	I'm not sure, but they ___ arrive before 6 p.m. · A) must B) can't C) may D) will
10	He ___ to come tomorrow — his shift was cancelled. · A) might not have B) doesn't have C) can't have D) may not have



ANSWER KEYS

Check your answers

Practice · Part 5

1	C — might	<i>Uncertain future → might/may/could. Not 'can'.</i>
2	A — must	<i>Strong deduction from evidence → must.</i>
3	B — can't	<i>Impossible based on evidence → can't.</i>
4	C — could	<i>'I'm not sure' = guessing → could/may/might.</i>
5	B — might	<i>Past possibility (not sure) → might have.</i>
6	A — must	<i>Evidence (lights off) → must have.</i>
7	B — could	<i>'It depends' = uncertain → could.</i>
8	C — might not	<i>Possibility something won't happen → might not.</i>

Quiz · Part 8

1	C — might	<i>50% chance = uncertain → might.</i>
2	B — must	<i>Evidence (studying all day) → must.</i>
3	C — can't	<i>Known fact (Sarah in NY) = impossible → can't.</i>
4	A — might	<i>Past possibility (not sure) → might have.</i>
5	C — could	<i>Uncertain future → could.</i>
6	C — must	<i>Evidence (dark clouds) → must.</i>
7	D — may	<i>Uncertain past → may have.</i>
8	B — can't	<i>Too new = impossible → can't.</i>
9	C — may	<i>'I'm not sure' = uncertainty → may.</i>
10	B — doesn't have	<i>Shift cancelled = no obligation → doesn't have to. (Connects back to L11!)</i>

Great work on Lesson 12! You now hold the certainty scale: *may/might/could* for guessing, *must* for positive deduction, *can't* for "impossible" — plus past possibility with *might have / could have + V3*. In **Lesson 13**, we move from single modals to full sentence patterns: the **First Conditional** — *if + present simple, will + base verb* — for real, possible situations in the future.