

MODAL VERB: MAY

PERMISSION

We use **may** to ask for, give and refuse permission. It is quite formal.

asking for permission	giving permission	refusing permission
May I leave the room?	Yes, you may .	No, you may not .
May we use your phone?	Yes, you may .	No, you may not .

Can, *could* and *may* are all used to ask for permission. *May* is the most formal/polite and *could* is more formal and polite than *can*.

POSSIBILITY

We use **may** to refer to weak possibility in the present and future:

- The economy **may** go up or down in the next year. (I think both are possible, the economy going up or the economy going down. I am not making either one a strong possibility.)
- I think I **may** go to the doctor today and try to get some antibiotics. (I am not very sure yet if I will go to the doctor.)

GENERAL TRUTHS

We use **may** in formal writing, especially academic English, to describe things which the speaker thinks are generally true or possible. In this case, it is a more formal equivalent of *can*.

WISH

Used to introduce a wish or a hope:

- *May you have a long and fruitful marriage.*

SUGGESTION

Used to make a suggestion or suggest a possibility in a polite way:

- *You may want to have a bite to eat before you leave.*

ACCEPTING A DIFFERENT VIEW OR OPINION

We use *may* in formal writing, especially academic English, to describe things which the speaker thinks are generally true or possible. In this case, it is a more formal equivalent of *can*.

- One month **may** well be too long to go away on holiday.
- I **may** be wrong but I am going to tell the police about it.
- The couch **may** well cost more but it's going to be different.

MAY: FORMS

AFFIRMATIVE

May comes first in the verb phrase (after the subject and before another verb):

- It **may** be possible for him to get home tonight.

May can't be used with another modal verb:

- This **may** hurt you.

Not: ~~This may could hurt you.~~ or ~~This could may hurt you.~~

NEGATIVE

The negative form of *may* is *may not*. We don't use *don't/doesn't/didn't* with *may*:

- We **may not** have enough information at the moment.

Not: ~~We don't may have enough information at the moment.~~

Warning:

We don't use *mayn't* as the contracted form of *may not*:

- We **may not** yet know what is safe to eat.

Not: ~~We mayn't yet know what is safe to eat.~~

QUESTION

Warning:

The subject and *may* change position to form questions. We don't use *do/does/did*:

- **May** we drop you at your hotel?

Not: ~~Do we may drop you at your hotel?~~

- **May** I leave the room, please?

Not: ~~Do I may leave the room please?~~

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