MAY: USES
(Modal Verb)

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

- ***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?~~