

Possibility - Might May Could

Might - Weaker Possibility

May - Stronger Possibility

Could - Possibility - Neutral Possibility

1) Dialog Excerpt from the movie Titanic

Andrews: The pumps buy you time ... but minutes only. From this moment, no matter what we do, Titanic will flounder.

Smith: How much time?

Andrews: An hour, two at most.

Smith: And how many aboard, Mr. Murdoch?

Murdoch: Two thousand two hundred souls aboard, sir.

Smith: I believe you **may** get your headlines, Mr. Ismay.

Mr. Ismay got his headlines. Using “may” indicates a stronger possibility. Maybe, Captain Smith is being sarcastic because he could easily have used “will”. He did not use “might” because “might” indicates a weaker possibility.

2) Dialog Quotation from the movie The Temptations

Melvin develops rheumatoid arthritis, and due to his constant pain relies heavily on pain pills and cortisone injections.

The doctor says to Melvin, "If you keep doubling up on your shots, arthritis **may** be the least of your problems."

The cortisone injections led to other health complications. The possibility of Melvin having more problems with his health due to the cortisone injections was strong in the doctor's view, and that's why he used “may”.

3) Use “might” and “may” to speak of true intentions. If you use “might” or “may”, you are not making a suggestion. You are stating your possible actions.

What are your plans for July? We **might** go to Maine or Vermont. This is a weaker possibility. This is not a suggestion.

What are your plans for July? We **may** go to Maine or Vermont. This is a stronger possibility. This is not a suggestion.

4) Use “could” for a suggestion. If you use “could”, you are making a suggestion or stating what is possible.

What do you want to do in July? We **could** go to Maine or Vermont. This is a suggestion or an idea. It's a possibility.

5) What did someone possibly do? What possibly happened?

Where's Joe?

1. He might've gone to the movies. It's possible that he went to the movies. This is a weaker possibility.
 2. He may have gone to the movies. It's possible that he went to the movies. This is a stronger possibility.
 3. He could've gone to the movies. It's possible that he went to the movies. This is a neutral possibility.
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6) Two ways to understand “could have done”

A. Joe could have gone to the movies. It was possible for Joe to go to the movies, but he didn't.

B. Joe could have gone to the movies. It's possible that Joe went to the movies. Maybe he's at the movies now.
