

Misused Verbs: Can/May

Name: _____

“Can” is quite often misused in place of the correct word, “may.” This is partly because so many people have just gotten lazy about using correct grammar. However, can and may are also challenging because they do not have real clear past tense forms. **Could** is sometimes okay to use as the past tense form of can, but **was able to** is more appropriate most of the time. **Might** is still the correct past tense form of may, but it is being used less and less.

Can: can means to have the ability to do something, or to be able to do it.



Can is the correct present tense form of the verb. **Was able to** is the correct past tense form of the verb.

*I **can** ride a motorcycle.*

*Last year I **was able to** ride a bicycle.*

May : may means to have permission, or to be allowed to do something. **May** is the correct present tense form of the verb. However, **Might** is the correct past tense form of the verb.



*My mom says I **may** go on the fieldtrip.*

*I had to get the form signed so that I **might** go on the trip.*

Choose “can,” “was able to,” “may,” or “might” to complete each sentence.

1. The old man _____ (can/was able to/may/might) walk with a cane yesterday.
2. My teacher _____ (can/was able to/may/might) recite 24 digits of Pi.
3. Jeff and Tom _____ (can/was able to/may/might) attend the private party.
4. Grandmother _____ (can/was able to/may/might) eat when she comes out of surgery.
5. My brother _____ (can/was able to/may/might) kick a football across the whole field.
6. Yesterday, she _____ (can/was able to/may/ might) pay off her credit card.
7. My dad says I _____ (can/was able to/may/might) sleep at my friend’s house tonight.
8. Last year, I _____ (can/was able to/may/might) earn my diploma and graduate.
9. My teacher said I _____ (can/was able to/may/might) participate in the show.
10. Your cousin Joe _____ (can/was able to/may/might) whistle through his teeth.

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*I had to get the form signed so that I **might** go on the trip.*

Choose “can,” “was able to,” “may,” or “might” to complete each sentence.

1. The old man was able to (can/was able to/may/might) walk with a cane yesterday.
2. My teacher can (can/was able to/may/might) recite 24 digits of Pi.
3. Jeff and Tom may (can/was able to/may/might) attend the private party.
4. Grandmother may (can/was able to/may/might) eat when she comes out of surgery.
5. My brother can (can/was able to/may/might) kick a football across the whole field.
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