We use question tags when we want to get the answer we need, don't we?

Better Speaking: Question Tags

Question tags are short interrogative phrases we add at the end of a sentence to transform it into a question, as in "this is coffee, isn't it?"

They're common and we use them mainly to confirm information, to keep conversation going and to subtly get listeners to agree with our proposals. This last property makes question tags very useful in business English. Let's see some examples.

We can use them to confirm facts we presume true, as in "Peter can't speak French, can he?" or in "Tina works in production, doesn't she?"

They're useful to keep conversations alive. Typical examples would be "It won't rain, will it?", "It's a bit cold here, isn't it?" or "This beer tastes good, doesn't it?"

We also apply question tags when we want listeners to agree, as in these cases: "Hailey's the right person for the job, isn't she?" or "Other suppliers can't give you such good prices, can they?"

This last characteristic makes questions tags helpful in business situations where you want to lead listeners towards a specific answer. As a convincing tool, it works much better than direct questions, as you'll see if you compare the examples below:

Make question tags by adding negative endings to affirmative sentences, as in "She will arrive late, won't she?"

Or by adding positive endings to negative sentences, like this example "They can't manage the problem, can they?"

- ❖ "Is our machine the best in the market?"
- ❖ "Our machine is the best in the market, isn't it?"

You're asking the same question but in the second you let the listener know what your opinion is and it invite them to reply yes, especially because no further effort is needed on their part. They don't need to think about other machines. You've just told them yours is the best!

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