Vaughn, Chapter 4 Reasons for Belief and Doubt (with emphasis on doubt)

- Sometimes we are evaluating the reasons given for a claim.
- But sometimes we are evaluating a claim itself, without reasons being given to us for the claim, as is often the case with the premises in an argument.
- QUESTION: What kinds of reasons might we have for accepting or doubting claims in the absence of argument?

Examine: Reasons for doubt, and reasons for belief

I. The role of conflict between claims
   A. Sometimes we need to resolve conflicts between claims before we can be justified in accepting one and rejecting another.
      1. lack of reliability of source can be a reason not to trust a claim
      2. examining evidence for each
   B. We should proportion our belief to our evidence
   C. It is not reasonable to believe a claim when there is no justification for doing so. (withhold judgment vs. reject the claim)
   D. If a claim conflicts with other claims we have good reason to accept, we have good grounds for rejecting it.
      1. conflict with background evidence – well supported beliefs we rely on to guide actions & choices.
      2. conflict with consensus among experts on the subject at hand
         a. qualification as an expert
            i. minimal requirements for being an expert
               A. education, training in respected program in relevant field
               B. experience in making reliable judgments in relevant field
            ii. strong evidence of being an appropriate expert
               A. reputation among peers
               B. professional accomplishments
               C. credentials (such as degrees, professional certification)
            b. reason to doubt an expert (see p. 135, and next section)
               self-interest, bias, out of date, isolated view, dismisses criticism
c. RELATED FALLACY: appeal to (illegitimate) authority
   i. prestige or status is not due to expertise (ex: celebrity)
   ii. expertise is in a field not relevant to the issue at hand

II. CONSIDER THE SOURCE: Do you have reasons not to trust this source?
   A. Experts and evidence – consider qualifications & reasons to doubt above
   B. Conflicts of interest? (common in advertising)
   C. History of dishonesty, error, or other ways of being unreliable?
   D. Is there reason to think source is giving partial or inaccurate information?
      (special worries about politicians, internet sources)
   E. Does the source fail to give supporting information, or give it in a way
      that makes it hard to verify?

III. CONSIDER THE SOURCE: the limitations of personal experience
   - Personal experience (our own or others’)
     senses, experience, judgment involved in using those faculties
   * It is reasonable to accept evidence provided by personal experience only
     if there is no good reason to doubt it (p. 137)
   A. Limited access to information
      1. Simply not in a position to observe certain things
      2. Impairment (p. 137)
         a. conditions of observer
         b. environmental conditions that can distort observation
      3. how memory works (see “p3 Brain lies” posting)
         a. forgetting
         b. selective remembering – recall what is dramatic, or repeated
         c. source amnesia – forget where got info, & how dependable
         c. fill in gaps, not always accurately
   B. expectations (including biases) (p. 140)
   C. Innumeracy (p. 141)
      1. mistaken belief that an event is too improbable to be coincidence
      2. gambler’s fallacy (p. 142)
   D. Fooling ourselves (p. 143 +)
      1. Resisting evidence [Why? What kind of evidence do we resist?] 
         unfavorable to what we want to believe, to our friends
         shows we made a mistake
      2. Looking for confirming evidence [examples?]
      3. Availability error
         overemphasize the dramatic, novel, recent
IV. Special information environments

A. Advertising & its ploys
   1. purpose
   2. ploys (p. 156 – 158)
      a. identification
         (appeal to emotion)
         (appeal to authority)
      b. slogans
         catchy phrases used repeatedly
      c. misleading comparisons
         Sale price 40% off manufacturer’s suggested retail (when the
         item was previously selling for 35% off MSR)
      d. weasel words
         water down a claim so it is technically true, but misleading
         ex: … some at prices as low as $20

B. News media
   1. Safeguards
   2. Limitations
      a. access to information may be restricted
      b. cost - cover stories that are cheaper, polls,
         use press releases rather than investigating
      c. fear of offending advertisers, fear of lawsuits
      d. expectations of what will please &/or entertain audiences
      e. how a story is reported can make it seem more, or less, important
         - order, amount of time or space given to story
   3. Sorting out the news (strategies for information users) (pp. 152-153)
      a. Consider whether report conflicts with what you have good
         reason to believe
      b. Look for reporter slanting
      c. Consider the reporter's source
      d. Be suspicious if relevant information is missing
      e. Question whether story is being given undue emphasis

C. Internet: special limitations?
   1. On many sites, no fact checkers or editors check accuracy of claims
   2. Often hard to identify source or who is posting – whatever constraint
      might be imposed by fear of exposure when posting is found out to
      be inaccurate is absent
   3. Knowledge that once something is out there it can spread a viewpoint
      effectively, even if forced to withdraw later (see “p3 Brain Lies”)