# ENSURING THAT THE EVIDENCE FOR OUR ARGUMENTS IS OF ‘GOOD’ QUALITY

How can we go about ensuring that any evidence is of good quality? There are a number of ideas to consider carefully.

1. **Be sure not to omit any relevant information**

If I am writing about the possibility of a relationship between two ideas, then I will need to include information relating to the issues covered in the question. I need to ensure that I can show what I mean by the two ideas, why the issue of this relationship is important, whether there is any information which suggests that the two ideas might be related (or not!), and why different sources of information might come to different conclusions – if indeed they do. Finally, I would also be expected to refer to any major credible sources of information, including major theories and ideas in the area.

For example, if I wanted to show in my essay that physical height was related to physical strength, it would be silly of me to forget to include some content on either height or strength. I would also need to define the two concepts, say why I thought they might be related, the evidence that said they were not (if any existed), and give some rationale for why this question was important.

1. **Making a logical argument and recognising assumptions**

If we are to understand whether what someone says is correct or not, then we need to understand that people sometimes make statements which may or may not have some assumptions built into them, and which may or may not be logical.

1. **Logic, relationships and causation**

Simple logic looks at how items seem to relate to each other. In the example above, performance is measured against degree results. If the two items vary with each other, there is said to be a relationship between them – i.e. a correlation.

|  |
| --- |
| **Definition**:  Correlation = a statistical relationship where two items are seen to vary at the same time. |

If the values of both items increase or decrease at the same time, then the correlation is positive.

If the value of one item increases at the same time that the other value decreases, then the correlation is negative.

If the values do not seem to vary at the same time, then there is said to be no correlation.

A strong correlation is usually seen as a rating greater than 0.5 or -0.5. A weak correlation is seen as 0.5 to -0.5.

However, just because there appears to be a correlation (i.e. the two items vary together) does not mean that one item *causes* the other. That is one of the mistakes that is being made by the employer above. The employer is assuming that a degree classification leads to success in the work.

|  |
| --- |
| **Definition and discussion**:  *Causality*: the cause of a change in one item is caused by the change in another. |

When two things vary together, one could be said to *cause* the other. This is an incorrect assumption. In fact they could just be varying together for a short period of time, or there could be a third factor that it causing them both to vary.

However, even without the idea of causality, the employer is still making a second error. The second mistake relates to the number of employers being examined. If the employer had looked at 500 employees and found that all of the best employees (200) had a first-class degree, then maybe their conclusion might have been more logical and credible.

In addition, the logic was flawed in another way: the employer’s conclusion was not correct because *he had not proved that the opposite was NOT true.*

Whilst the employer did check that the higher performers had a higher level of degree, they did not check whether any of the lower performers had a first-class degree. If any of the lower performers had possessed a first-class degree, then the argument that performance and degree classification were linked would be weakened.