

Claiming a Cause

Sociology

What a correlation needs before it is allowed to become a causal claim.

Each row is a question the claim must survive.

Test	The question
Association	Do they actually move together, and how strongly?
Time order	Did the cause come first, or is that assumed?
Non-spuriousness	What third factor could produce both?
Mechanism	By what process would one produce the other?
Counterfactual	What would have happened without it?
Selection	Who chose into this group, and why?

Educational reference. Selection is the standard problem in sociology: people are rarely assigned to families, schools or neighbourhoods.