Sufficient Statistics

Consider a family of probability distributions P_X^θ which is parametrized by θ. Let $T(X)$ be any statistic (i.e. a function of sample X). It then holds that

$$\theta \rightarrow X \rightarrow T(X).$$

Hence, by the data-processing inequality, it holds that $I(\theta;X) \geq I(\theta;T(X))$, with equality if $I(\theta;X \mid T(X)) = 0$, or in other words, equality holds if $\theta \leftrightarrow T(X) \leftrightarrow X$ is also a Markov chain. As we want to make sure that our statistic does not lose any information about the parameter θ, we define the following.

Definition: Sufficient statistic

T(X) is a sufficient statistic if $P_{X|T(X)}$ is independent of θ for any distribution of θ.

Example: Coin Flips

Let $X_1, X_2, \ldots, X_n$ be iid coinflips, i.e. Bernoulli(p) variables and let $T(X_1, X_2, \ldots, X_n) = \sum_{i=1}^n X_i$ be a statistic. We have that

$$p \rightarrow X_1, \ldots, X_n \rightarrow \sum_{i=1}^n X_i = T(X_1, \ldots, X_n).$$

The probability of a particular outcome $x_1 \ldots x_n$ is given by

$$P_{X_1 \ldots X_n}(x_1, \ldots, x_n) = p^{T(x)}(1-p)^{n-T(x)}.$$

Observe that given that the number of 1's is $T(x)$, all strings with that property are evenly likely (and therefore independent of p). Hence $T(X) = \sum_{i=1}^n X_i$ is a sufficient statistic according to the definition above.