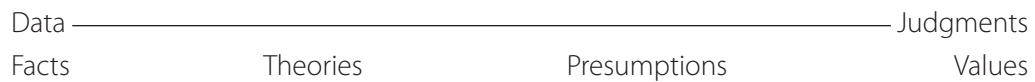


- theories
- presumptions
- values

These, in turn, can be arranged according to the apparent “hardness” of the data each type provides. Statistics or historical events would be toward the harder *data* end of the spectrum, while widely held political or legal principles would be placed nearer to the softer *judgments*.



This organization does not make any one type of evidence more empirically “true” than any other; many an inaccurate—or more often irrelevant—“fact” lurks out there, as do a lot of clearly true values. However, the scale might provide a useful guide as we review each type.

Broadly, these types could be defined as follows:

- *Facts.* Facts are data that either have been or could be observed as being empirically true. Critically, this kind of evidence relates to events that have happened or are happening in the observable world around us. They might come from the speaker’s own experience, those of commonly shared experiences familiar to the audience, or from a dependable and reliable third source. For example, neither the speaker nor the audience is likely to have personal experience of the remote exploration of Mars, so facts are likely to be drawn from newspaper reports or NASA’s website or some similar source. By contrast, both the speaker and the audience are likely to have experience of life as a schoolchild, the price of gas, or knowledge of the lead stories on that day’s news shows.

Types of facts include statistical data, historical examples that are clearly relevant to the issue, academic or other empirical studies, or polling data. Any of these could act as the basis for an argument:

According to a recent CNN/USA Today Poll, 66% of Americans believe . . .

Rates of unemployment are currently higher than they have been since . . .

Solid pieces of information like these are where a fact-based argument starts.