



DIVISION OF  
Arts and Sciences

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Dear Arts & Sciences Students, Faculty, and Staff:

Hello, I am Jason Stone, the Division Head of Arts & Sciences at OSU-OKC. Let's continue our conversation about your future. I am delighted that you chose to invest in yourself and attend to the next video in our series about the Habits of the Mind. The Habit that we are stressing in this video is communicating with precision and accuracy.

*The Habits of the Mind* authors Costa and Kallick encourage us to "be clear", and strive for accuracy and precision in both your written and verbal forms. Professor of Theater at Ursinus College in Pennsylvania, Domenick Scudera, asserts that overgeneralizing simplifies ideas and often leads to misinformed and misguided statement. As a teacher of communication and argumentation skills, I vigorously agree. In interpersonal communication, many arguments and conflicts are started because of sweeping generalizations.

A scenario might help clarify my meaning. Imagine that you are at home. You are watching television and studying for an exam. Your roommate comes home and takes a look at the kitchen and observes, "Wow, the kitchen is really dirty. You *never* wash the dishes." While it is true that you don't do the dishes very often, you spent 3 hours this past weekend doing the dishes and cleaning the kitchen spotless. Your feelings are hurt that your roommate's statement seems to disregard your effort this past weekend. Sweeping generalizations oftentimes cause arguments. Notice I used the word "oftentimes" in the previous sentence; I refrained from using the word "always".

A scholar of philosophy who extensively studied how words impact arguments was Stephen Toulmin. Toulmin developed a model of argument that features an examination of modal qualifiers. A modal qualifier is a term that clarifies when an argument is true or false. It helps answer the question, "under what circumstances is this statement true?" Is it true most of the time? All of the time? Some of the time? Under what circumstance does this argument apply?

Lindsay Lohan created a lot of controversy when she overgeneralized about her 90 day incarceration. She compared her treatment in the U.S. and California correctional system to the stoning of an Iranian woman for adultery. Clearly being locked up in a humane detention center for three months is not comparable to being beaten to death with rocks thrown by an angry crowd. We see a lot of such harmful overgeneralizations in celebrity twitter feeds. Mistweets by Kanye West, Ashton Kutcher, Charlie Sheen, and Courtney Love are all great examples of creating problems for yourself with overgeneralizations.

Celebrities are not alone in their tendency to overgeneralize. Our politicians also do a fair amount of overgeneralization. How many times have you heard U.S. politicians compared to



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other politicians with whom they disagree to Nazis? This type of overly general name-calling happens more frequently than most people would prefer. Mind your modal qualifiers; learn from the mistakes of others; minimize unnecessary confusion and conflict by communicating with precision and accuracy.

Please join me and attend to the other videos in this series. Invest in yourself and your future. Attend to your thinking habits. Your mental habits will determine how far you go. Thank you for your time and attention.

Have a great day and "Go Pokes!"

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