



VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY  
English Language Center

**SUPPLEMENT TO**  
**I NEVER THOUGHT**  
**OF IT THAT WAY:**  
**HOW TO HAVE**  
**FEARLESSLY CURIOUS**  
**CONVERSATIONS**  
**IN DANGEROUSLY**  
**DIVIDED TIMES**

**CAMPUS READING**  
**2024**

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Use this QR code to find the ELC on social media or click this link:

<https://vanderbilteclc.my.canva.site/>

## What is our *Supplement to I Never Thought of It That Way*?

This guide was created for incoming undergraduate students at Vanderbilt University who use English as an additional language (EAL). Our **Supplement to *I Never Thought of It That Way: How to Have Fearlessly Curious Conversations in Dangerously Divided Times*** by Mónica Guzmán<sup>[1]</sup> has two goals:

- to help you read texts about unfamiliar topics
- to help you internalize relevant themes from *I Never Thought of It That Way*

First, we include several tools to equip you with a more complete understanding of the text:

- **Reading strategies:** develops skills such as building background knowledge, identifying cultural references, previewing, skimming, and scanning
- **Recognizing organizational and stylistic elements:** explores skills for reading accuracy and comprehension, including sections about chapter structure, identifying Guzmán's<sup>[2]</sup> signpost language, and her writing style
- **Applying Guzmán's advice in international contexts:** offers helpful language to employ during difficult conversations and guides reflection on how your cultural, linguistic, and educational background can support you when discussing controversial topics

The second goal, internalizing relevant themes from *I Never Thought of It That Way*, is more difficult to achieve. We focus the supplement on recognizing and interpreting cultural references as well as stylistic and organizational elements in *I Never Thought of It That Way*, and we hope this helps you read more quickly and accurately. In turn, this may help clarify complex issues raised in your classes and [Vanderbilt Visions group](#) and even improve your persuasive and analytical writing during your first year at Vanderbilt.

Find this supplement online here: <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/elc/resources/supplement-to-i-never-thought-of-it-that-way/>

Use the tools pictured below to help as you read:

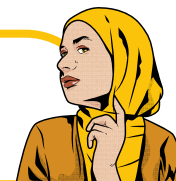
Want to know more? <sup>[3]</sup>

Expand your knowledge with links to online resources in these boxes.



Focus on...

Complete activities to further your understanding by following the directions in these boxes.



Notice...

Consider details not immediately apparent from examples or explanations.



[1] *I Never Thought of It That Way: How to Have Fearlessly Curious Conversations in Dangerously Divided Times* by Mónica Guzmán, 2022, BenBella Books, Inc. This supplement is based on the Kindle Edition.

[2] In this supplement, we refer to the author in two ways: by her whole name, Mónica Guzmán, and by her last name, Guzmán.

[3] Tool icon art provided courtesy of Canva.

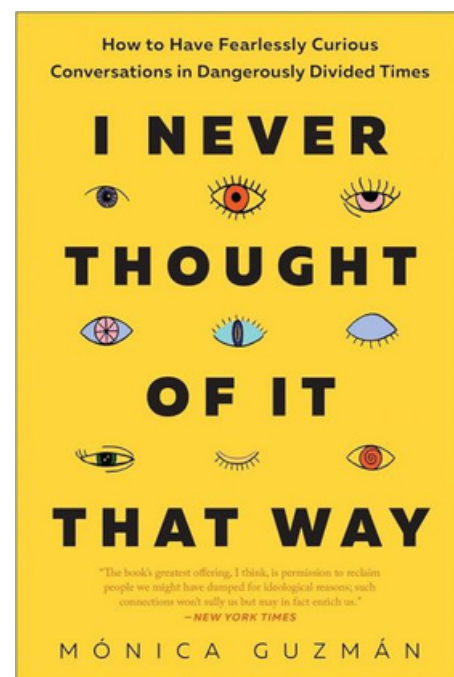
## Choosing *I Never Thought of It That Way* at Vanderbilt University

In the past two years, we have watched several global conflicts escalate to violence, including the war in Ukraine, the conflict between Israel and Gaza, and the crisis in Sudan. Such escalating struggles have intensified discussion and debate worldwide about how best to achieve peace. In the United States, political divisions have both intensified and solidified as we debate such conflicts and more in the context of the U.S. presidential election in November 2024, in which many of your Vanderbilt classmates will be voting for the first time. As tensions have escalated, so has the need for our community to employ strategies to keep our conversations respectful, constructive, and inclusive.

To this end, the Ingram Commons theme for the 2024–2025 academic year is “Embracing the Debate.” The university chose *I Never Thought of It That Way* as the [Campus Reading](#) so you and your peers can more fully participate in ongoing conversations about difficult and controversial topics at Vanderbilt. As [Chancellor Diermeier said](#), “Teaching first-year students how to have constructive conversations about divisive subjects is one of the best ways we can continue to build a campus culture of open, courageous, and respectful dialogue and help students honor our [Community Creed](#).”

When you come to campus, you will be joining a long-standing and highly valued tradition of encouraging deep conversations and constructive debate in the United States and the Vanderbilt community. In the United States, you are protected by the Constitution in the [First Amendment](#), which grants freedom of speech as a human right. On campus, the Vanderbilt community has valued the right to free speech by encouraging discussion of controversial issues to dissect and solve problems impacting the world. In fact, Vanderbilt University as an institution has committed to remaining neutral in these debates to encourage students with diverse viewpoints to share their ideas.

*I Never Thought of It That Way* can help you decide whether and how to engage in difficult conversations on campus. Continue reading this Supplement to build your background knowledge and support your reading experience.



[Image Source](#)

## Reading Strategies

### Building Background Knowledge

Before you read *I Never Thought of It That Way*, consider what you know about the book’s central topic: how to engage in difficult conversations about divisive, controversial issues. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Have you studied this topic previously?
- What can you remember about this topic?
- What is your understanding of this topic?

A large body of research has confirmed that building background knowledge of both vocabulary and content is vital to increasing reading comprehension.[4] The following sections offer guidance about activating and growing your background knowledge as you read.

[4] Hirsch, E. D. (2003). Reading comprehension requires knowledge of words and the world. *American Educator*, 27(1), 10-13.

## Guzmán's Audience

Guzmán uses [anecdotes](#) from her life to introduce advice throughout the book. Her family history, bilingual household, and life experiences are woven throughout the book to help readers apply her advice in real-life situations. Because she grew up in the Seattle area and has lived and worked in the U.S. throughout her life, many of her examples assume the reader knows about recent political events in the U.S., as seen on the very first page of the book:

"On the morning of **Election Day 2020**, I was driving east from Seattle to my parents' house in Redmond, Washington, wondering if I should turn around. About a week earlier, I'd asked my parents if I could watch the results of the **presidential election** from their house. Mom blinked over her plate of carnitas tacos from the food truck down the way. She looked at Dad, then back at me. "*Claro, Moni*," she said in Spanish. *Of course, Moni*. Then her eyes held mine a moment, asking what I was silently asking myself: *But are you sure you want to?* After all, I'm a **liberal** who voted for **Joe Biden**, and Mom and Dad are **conservatives** who voted enthusiastically—and twice, now—for **Donald Trump**." [5]

This passage uses phrases like "presidential election," "liberal," and "conservative," assuming U.S.-based definitions of those terms. In your home country, liberal and conservative policies may vary considerably from those in the U.S. Additionally, there are many references to U.S. politics and political figures, such as "Election Day 2020," "Joe Biden," and "Donald Trump." Lastly, you can also see that the italicized text highlights Spanish words and their English translations, included because her family speaks both English and Spanish at home. As you read, consider that even though Guzmán's examples focus on U.S. history, culture, and politics, you can consider this book as an opportunity:

- **If you are interested**, you can use these examples to learn about some of the political topics your North American classmates may be discussing this fall. Scroll to the next section about Central Themes or jump to our Cultural References section below to get information about specific cultural references organized by page number.
- **If you are not interested in learning about U.S. politics**, you can skim such examples and focus instead on Guzmán's advice about building constructive conversations, which you can apply to any topic. Below, advice about skimming and scanning can help you.

### Want to know more?

Don't have a lot of time to explore U.S. politics? This video offers a strong general background about the references Guzmán makes to liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans, and blue and red ideologies:

[U.S. Political Parties: Comparing Republicans and Democrats](#)



## Central Themes from *Never Thought of It That Way*

Consult the following websites to build upon your current background knowledge:

- [U.S. Political Parties: Comparing Republicans and Democrats](#)
- [TED Talk: The Moral Roots of Liberals and Conservatives, by Jonathan Haidt](#)
- [Mónica Guzmán's TED Talk \[6\]](#)
- [Interactive Chart of Media Bias in the U.S.](#)

- [Where Biden and Trump Stand on Key Issues](#)
- [The Pros and Cons of Top Issues in the 2024 Presidential Race](#)

### BOOK THEMES

### THE US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

[5] *Never Thought of It That Way* by Guzmán, 2018, Harper Business, Kindle Edition, p. xv (*italics* in original, **bold** emphasis added)

[6] If you are not familiar with U.S. political parties and figures, we recommend watching the [Comparing Republicans and Democrats](#) video before viewing Guzmán's TED Talk.

## CURRENT CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS AT VANDERBILT

- [Spring 2024 Protests at Vanderbilt University](#)
- [The Vanderbilt Hustler Coverage of Kirkland Sit-ins \[7\]](#)
- [Vanderbilt Student Government Support of Spring 2024 Student Protestors](#)
- [Vanderbilt College Democrats and Republicans Debate Series Fall 2024](#)

## VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY AND FREE SPEECH

- [History of Freedom of Speech in the U.S.](#)
- [Free Speech at University Campuses](#)
- [What Students Should Know Before Demonstrating on Campus](#)
- [2024 Vanderbilt Free Speech Summit](#)

## Content Overview

*I Never Thought of It That Way* explains the social dynamics that can encourage us to feel divided by controversial issues. Then, Guzmán shows us many strategies with accompanying language for counteracting those forces and creating an atmosphere where everyone is comfortable being curious and encouraged to contribute. You can think of this book as a collection of small problem-solution essays that combine to create one complex book.

Guzmán's book is split into five parts:

- **Part 1: SOS** defines sorting, othering, and siloing, three dynamics that divide us, and introduces one way we can help guard against these forces: building bridges to connect us.
- **Part 2: Curiosity** warns us against shutting down our curiosity. By offering tools to awaken our curiosity, Guzmán shows us how to help "push" conversations to be more impactful.
- **Part 3: People** demonstrates how we can identify our own harmful assumptions and turn them into questions that nurture open-minded conversations.
- **Part 4: Paths** expands on the advice about questions in Part 3 to illustrate how storytelling helps identify principles that influence our deepest beliefs, a key part of ensuring we can listen openly to ideas that conflict with ours.
- **Part 5: Honesty** describes how we can express our ideas clearly and encourage others to do the same while encouraging constructive dialogue.

### Want to know more?

Mónica Guzmán offers [a helpful summary](#) of her advice in this short podcast. Watching it ahead of time can help you absorb the book content more efficiently. If you are unfamiliar with U.S. politics, you might need to watch the videos about book themes on page 4 to recognize her references.



Reading chapter summaries does not offer the full experience of reading the book, which is complete with examples, research, and practical advice. We recommend using these resources to support your experience while reading the book.

For more information about how the book chapters are organized, see the section on pp. 8-9 about Chapter Structure.

[7]The Vanderbilt Hustler is the student newspaper on campus and covers topics related to the VU community. Student journalists are encouraged to investigate news stories, ask difficult questions, and praise or critique the school as they see fit.



## Cultural References and Slang

Mónica Guzmán refers to U.S. culture, politics, and [Latinx](#) life throughout the book, sometimes with slang expressions. As you read, click the links below and learn more about distinctly North American historical and cultural references in each part of the book.

**WARNING** The links in this section contain potentially distressing content.

### Introduction

- [Election Day 2020](#) (p. xv)
- [Liberal and Conservative in the U.S.](#) (p. xv)
- [Joe Biden](#) (p. xv)
- [Donald Trump](#) (p. xv)
- [Bush-Cheney sign](#) (p. xvi)
- [Political yard signs in the U.S.](#) (p. xvi)
- [Republicans and Democrats in the U.S.](#) (p. xvi)
- [Michael Moore Documentary Fahrenheit 9/11](#) (p. xvi)
- [Blue and Red Colors in U.S. Politics](#) (p. xvi)
- [“The talk of Mexico sending rapists and criminals”](#) (p. xvi)
- [“Choose Life”](#) (p. xvii)
- [Bumper Stickers in the U.S.](#) (p. xvii)
- [Left vs. right political opinions in the U.S.](#) (p. xvii)
- [Hillary Clinton](#) (p. xvii)
- [“Joe Biden is an illegitimate president”](#) (p. xvii)
- [Authoritarianism](#) (p. xviii)
- [Liberal mainstream media](#) (p. xviii)
- [Centrist](#) (p. xviii)
- [Fox News](#) (p. xxiii)

Want to know more?

If you have been reading about U.S. political figures, it might help to look at a [timeline of recent elections](#). There, you can click back in time to see [electoral vote](#) totals and even read a list of the key issues in each election.



### Part 1: SOS

- [Mosey on over](#) (p. 6)
- [Getting the heck out of dodge](#) (p. 6)
- [Meatspace](#) (p. 9)
- [Newt Gingrich](#) (p. 10)
- [World Wrestling Federation](#) (p. 10)
- [Hulk Hogan’s Atomic Leg Drop](#) (p. 10)
- [The movie Jaws](#) (p. 11)
- [Hella](#) (p. 18)
- [Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s](#) (p. 23)
- [McCarthyism and the Red Scare](#) (p. 23)
- The [Ku Klux Klan](#) in [the 1920s](#) (p. 23)
- [“when our country went to war with itself”](#) (p. 23)
- [Ronald Reagan](#) (p. 23)

### Part 2: Curiosity

- [Kick it](#) (p. 50)
- [Old school](#) (p. 50)
- [Jibe](#) (p. 67)
- [Amirite](#) (p. 72)
- [Effing](#) (p. 79)
- [Get a grip](#) (p. 92)

### Part 5: Honesty

- [Privilege](#) (p. 207)
- [Cancel culture](#) (p. 207)
- [Alt-right in the U.S.](#) (p. 207) [8]
- [White fragility](#) (p. 207)
- [RINOs](#) (p. 207)

#### Notice: Cultural References

Did you notice that there are more U.S.-specific cultural references at the beginning of the book?

In the Introduction and Part 1, Guzmán spends more time discussing current issues dividing public opinion in the U.S. However, after Part 1, she spends more time describing strategies for having productive conversations about any difficult topic.



[8] Though it may be different in your home country, in the U.S., ideas on the “left” are considered liberal, while ideas on the “right” are conservative. For More information, watch this video about [left and right political opinions in the U.S.](#)

## Thinking Before You Read: Previewing the Text

Before reading each chapter in *I Never Thought of It That Way*, browse through it. Ask yourself:

- How many pages do I need to read?
- How long will it take to read?

Knowing the approximate length of the chapters will help you be realistic about the time you will need to read them.[9]

Also, because this text is structured as a problem-solution argument, knowing whether you are at the beginning, middle, or end of the chapters will help you identify where you are in the argument.

## Skimming and Scanning

Before reading *I Never Thought of It That Way*, it is helpful to glance through the pages and focus on the important parts to better understand the text.[10] This practice is called skimming.

Ask yourself:

- What do the chapter titles and section headers mean?
- What are the keywords in each title?
- What will each chapter's content be?
- How will each chapter support the book's overall argument?

You can better understand the organization of the book by skimming the material for important elements, which may also help you predict what comes next.

For example, by looking at the **front cover, back cover, and chapter titles**, you can predict that *I Never Thought of It That Way* examines different ways to connect through conversation. Furthermore, you can see the book reviews on the **front and back covers** and consider that this book is part of a larger conversation about curiosity, divisiveness, and assumptions.

**In each chapter**, Guzmán highlights main ideas using section **headers**. By paying attention to the headers, you can predict what each section might be about and guess its purpose.

**For example:**

1. The last headers in Chapters 11 - 13 are all written as versions of “[**number**] **Things to Try**,” such as “**Nine Things to Try**.”
2. Further, the headers in Chapters 14 and 15 are written in the imperative, such as “**Reach: Stay with their Meaning**” or “**Grip: Follow-Through**.”

Both header styles imply that she will offer concrete advice in these sections. If you are looking for Guzmán's strategies, you can find them there.

A similar skill is scanning. Scanning is to quickly look over a text without reading every single word. By looking over the text for keywords, definitions, and the central themes—not reading for complete understanding—you may quickly understand the essential elements in a specific passage and how they fit into the larger argument.[11]

In *I Never Thought of It That Way*, Guzmán argues that fostering curiosity and non-judgmental dialogue can allow you to build constructive conversations about controversial and divisive topics. As you read, you will notice that some passages are descriptions of anecdotes from her life, people she interviewed, and descriptions of social science experiments. These paragraphs often offer examples of social phenomena and are not always essential to understanding Guzmán's advice. It might benefit you to skim and scan these parts to focus on the main idea they are communicating. See the next section on Recognizing Organizational Elements for more help finding such places to skim and scan.

[9] Academic Reading: A Content-based Approach by Holschuh & Kelley, 1988, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 2

[10] Academic Reading: A Content-based Approach by Holschuh & Kelley, 1988, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 2–3

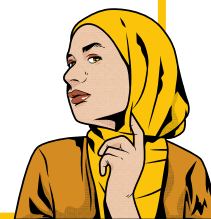
[11] A Good Read: Developing Strategies for Effective Reading 2 by Islam & Steenburgh, 2009, Cengage Learning, p. 8



**Focus on...**

For more information and practice with reading skills, you can also consult these textbooks. Though they were published a while ago, the information they share remains essential:

- Academic Reading: A Content-based Approach by Holschuh & Kelley, 1988
- Ready to Read More by Blanchard & Root, 2006
- A Good Read: Developing Strategies for Effective Reading by Islam & Steenburgh, 2009.

**Want to know more?**

The ELC has published a [Scholarly Reading Guide](#) to help you better read and comprehend scholarly texts, such as peer-reviewed journal articles. If you would like to review the information about skimming and scanning it provides, click here to read the section titled, [Reading Efficiently](#).



## Recognizing Organizational Elements in *I Never Thought of It That Way*

Think of *I Never Thought of It That Way* as a long problem-solution essay, and all the chapters as pieces of a puzzle that come together to support the overarching argument that embracing honesty, curiosity, and respect can support constructive conversations about controversial topics. This section can help you do two things to improve your reading comprehension and speed in *I Never Thought of It That Way* and other materials you read at Vanderbilt:

1. Focus on Sections: Recognize pieces of the organizational puzzle
2. See the Big Picture: See how the pieces fit together to support the overarching argument

### Chapter Structure

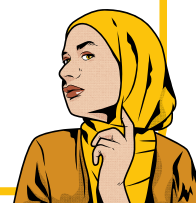
In addition to having a problem-solution structure, *I Never Thought of It That Way* is an [argumentative text](#) meant to support Guzmán's overarching thesis: If you embrace honesty, curiosity, and respect, you can overcome divisive forces and build constructive conversations about controversial topics. To make such a sweeping argument, Guzmán breaks her thoughts into chapters, headings, and paragraphs.

As you saw in the Content Overview, *I Never Thought of It That Way* has five parts. The chapters in each part contain different organizational patterns. Recognizing chapter structures can help you read more accurately because it can help you understand the purpose of each section as you read.[12]

**Focus on...**

Each time Guzmán says, “\_\_\_ goes too far when,” she offers a helpful paragraph-length summary of the chapter. You can read this paragraph before reading the rest of the chapter; understanding her main point can increase your reading comprehension [13] when you then read the chapter from the beginning.

- Chapter 1: See p. 15
- Chapter 2: See p. 30
- Chapter 3: See p. 42



[12] [Reading Skills for Academic Study: Understanding Texts](#) by Gillett, 2020

[13] [Reading Skills for Academic Study: Understanding Texts](#) by Gillett, 2020

## Part 1 — Defining Key Issues

It is helpful that all three chapters in Part 1 are organized the same way.

1. These chapters start with a definition of the term in the chapter title. Each term is the name of a social phenomenon.
2. Then, Guzmán offers examples from modern political history, social science experiments, and her life experiences to illustrate this social phenomenon in the real world.
3. Last, Guzmán explains the problems the social phenomenon causes, often with more real-world examples.
4. At the end of each chapter in Part 1, Guzmán uses the phrase, “\_\_\_ goes too far when” to summarize the main problems caused by the social phenomenon.

## Part 2 — Changing Your Mindset

The four chapters in Part 2 also have a similar organization, structured to start offering you advice.

1. These chapters open with extensive definitions of ideas or techniques that help you stay curious.
2. Then, they offer examples of how these techniques can look when applied in real-life scenarios.
3. Last, Guzmán offers advice about how you can apply these techniques.

In some chapters, these three steps fill the entire chapter (Chapter 4). In other chapters, the steps are repeated multiple times for different terms, looping the structure throughout the chapter (Chapter 5 has four loops).

## Part 3 — People Skills

Since these chapters focus on interpersonal skills, they are organized a bit differently.

1. Instead of an introductory explanation, each chapter starts with a true story about communicating.
2. Guzmán then uses the story's events to offer advice about building strong communicative habits.

## Part 4 — Connecting with Stories

These chapters also connect advice with stories.

1. These chapters all begin with examples from the real world that illustrate an issue with communication.
2. Then, Guzmán offers advice and interventions to help prevent or reduce the issues she introduced.

## Part 5 — Prioritizing Straightforwardness and Precision

Because the chapters in Part 5 are filled with advice, they are structured differently.

1. Section headers are key in Chapter 14 because each section offers advice on communicating clearly and precisely.
2. Chapter 15 is also focused on advice but does not use headers. Instead, it begins with a final instructive story that introduces the rest of her advice.

You can check here when you start each new part of the book. Knowing how the chapters in that section are organized can help you more efficiently, find places to skim and scan, and find the key information in each chapter—Guzmán's advice!

## Personal Narratives

In each chapter and in many sections, Guzmán provides examples in the form of stories from her life, individuals she has interviewed, and social science experiments. These examples, often presented early in the chapter, are then often paired with descriptions of social science theories about group dynamics. Together, they offer a dual glimpse into her main ideas: one side offers the abstract theory, and the other provides an example of how that dynamic has occurred in the real world. As you read, consider how these paired descriptions intertwine to create a precise explanation of her arguments and advice.

### Want to know more?

Mónica Guzmán's writing flows smoothly between abstract concepts and concrete examples. This technique, when applied to paragraph writing, is called the Uneven U, and you can use it too! Watch this video that explains the [Uneven U](#) if you would like to employ this writing technique at Vanderbilt.



## Headers

After Guzmán divides her argument into chapters, she further separates her thoughts into sections with headers. Reading headers can help you see what the next few pages will be focused on and even help you fit these sections into the larger argument in the chapter. Some headers clearly show what the section will be about, while others leave room for interpretation by the reader.

**For example, in Chapter 7: Traction**, section headers at the end of the chapter help us identify each tip she offers. However, in the next chapter, there is no list of tips, so the headers are more abstract. Despite these irregularities, remember that much of Guzmán's advice is offered in Parts IV (four) and V (five), so those chapters tend to have the clearest headers.

## Roadmaps and Signpost Language

In many instances, Guzmán offers a roadmap, also called a signpost, which is one or more sentences telling you what she is about to discuss. She previews what each chapter will be about in the Introduction and offers many "signposts" throughout the book to help you see what is coming next. For example, on page 2, Guzmán writes a standard roadmap for the upcoming chapters in Part One:

"In Part I, **I'm going to tell you** why these three patterns in how we relate to each other make it harder for us to see the world around us. **I'll tell you why** they're built-in features of our very social lives, and how they can work against us, warping our gaze beyond our own limited perspective."

The bolded language above emphasizes signpost language, words and phrases that signal the text's organization to readers. These phrases offer a clear preview of what is coming next. You might have found signpost language when you see language like "Let's start with" and "Next," as well as phrases using the future tense.

Other times, often on the last page of a chapter, Guzmán uses the name of the next chapter to introduce what is coming next. Take a look at this example from pages 15-16, where Guzmán offers a transition from Chapter 1: Sorting to Chapter 2: Othering:

“Of course, **sorting** into groups of like-minded people is only one of the things that keeps us from seeing the world clearly. We leap into our groups, happy and agreeable. And then we turn our attention to those **other** people. And things get a little dark.”

Notice here that Guzmán embeds the chapters’ names in her previews and writes that we will focus on the second term. It’s a nontraditional but rather artistic strategy she uses to offer us subtle signposts.

Each roadmap offers clues about what information to look for in the following section. Thus, identifying chapter structures, personal narratives, headers, and roadmaps can help you follow Guzmán’s argument as she shares and analyzes complex evidence and examples over many pages.

## Guzmán’s Writing Style

### Informal Stylistic Elements

Guzmán wrote *I Never Thought of It That Way* as a guide to teach non-experts like us how to build constructive conversations about divisive topics. This goal has influenced her writing style and formality. You may notice the following stylistic elements in the book which are not often found in formal academic writing:

- **Contractions:** When words are combined with an apostrophe (e.g., we will → we’ll or we have → we’ve)
- **Using I:** In a few academic fields, writers are encouraged to use I, but it is uncommon in many fields of study
- **Direct Address:** When the author speaks directly to the reader, often by using [imperative verbs](#) or pronouns such as you, we, or us
- **Informal Word Choices:** Word choices that reflect a more casual audience (for example, words often used in conversation, but not in formal writing)
- **Slang:** Newly popular or invented language, often with different meanings among a particular social group (e.g., “[meatspace](#)” on page 9).
- **Simple Sentences:** Informal writing often uses simpler sentence structures because the author breaks ideas into smaller chunks.

p. 5: “**Good** bonds are **good** for us. How **good**? We are twice as likely to die prematurely when we have weak relationships as when we have strong ones, according to one 2009 study. We bond more easily with people who are like us. So **hey—we’re** going to hang with **similarish** people and **it’s no big deal**. **Think** of **everything** it **serves up**: a **fun chat** at a party. Fast-forming friendships. Or the algorithmic efficiency of online dating. **Yay.**”

#### Want to know more?

Would you like to make your writing sound more or less formal depending on your audience? Consider signing up for our [writeELC](#) course or [1-to-1 Consultations](#) at the English Language Center to improve these scholarly writing techniques and more.



#### Informal Stylistic Elements:

- **Informal Word Choice**
- **Contractions**
- **Slang**
- **Direct Address**
- Simple Sentences

# Applying Guzmán's Advice

## Language For Constructive Conversations

In the book's last two chapters, Guzmán shares many tips and strategies we can apply to build constructive conversations about controversial topics. She also pairs some helpful language with her advice, offering deft phrasing you can use in various scenarios. To help you apply those phrases more efficiently, we have compiled her language (in blue) here and added more language (in black) to help you implement her advice.[14]

### PARAPHRASE TO SHOW YOU ARE LISTENING

- So, you're concerned that...
- Can I repeat that back to you just so I know I've got it?
- If I understood you correctly, ...
- (Excuse me but) Did you say...?
- (Just) to check if I (fully) understand you,...



### ASK FOR CLARIFICATION

- Let me make sure I understand what you're saying.
- Did I get that right?
- Am I missing anything?
- Sorry--did you just say you are OK with/support...?
- I'm afraid I didn't understand what you meant when you said...
- (I think) I missed the bit where you explained...
- (I'm afraid/ I'm sorry but/ Sorry but) I didn't catch the part about...

### IDENTIFY MOMENTS WHEN CLARITY IS OUT OF REACH

- It sounds like you're still figuring that out. What feels important as you think about it?
- The meaning is somewhat ambiguous but...
- I'm still not entirely sure what I think about...
- I'd like to learn more about...

### THINK OUT LOUD

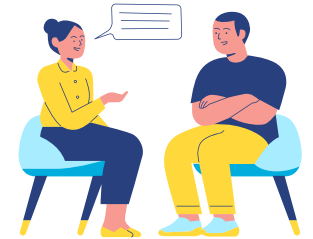
- Let me think out loud for a bit.
- Feel free to think out loud for a bit. Just let me know when you think you've gotten where you want to go.
- I wonder if...
- This makes me think of...
- Off the top of my head, I think...
- No filter, I think...



### CHECK BODY LANGUAGE FOR LISTENER ENGAGEMENT

Body language that might indicate the listener doesn't understand:

- or disagrees:
- A tilted head
- crossed arms
- looking into the distance
- tense facial muscles



What you can say:

- I'm not sure I'm being clear here. What am I missing?
- Based on your response, I think I should explain that again.
- From the expression on your face, it seems I may not have explained that well.
- Your voice/body language makes me wonder if I should try explaining again.

### (RE)CREATE BALANCE

- You know what? I'm doing way too much talking. You mentioned figuring out your position on...
- I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way at all. Let me try again.
- I'm afraid that came out wrong. What I am trying to say is...
- Can you offer your experience on...
- I would love to hear your thoughts on...

### BE AWARE OF EVERYONE'S FEELINGS

- I don't want to push beyond your comfort level.
- Let's pause there and reconcile and refresh and maybe come back to it at a different time.
- I'm not comfortable with this conversation.

### MAKE SPACE FOR EVERYONE TO PARTICIPATE

- I hear what you all are saying, but I see this differently. Let me try to explain what I mean...
- I come at this another way, I think.
- We're talking about X, but aren't we missing Y? I think it's important.
- Just taking a step back, I'm wondering if the way that we're talking about this gets to where you're coming from/doesn't represent your way of thinking.
- Is there something we're missing?



## A Final Language Tip from Mónica Guzmán

In addition to the phrasing on the previous page, Guzmán tells us to try and avoid inflammatory language, words that bring strong positive or negative feelings on either side of an issue. Instead, use your own words to describe your ideas, with the added bonus of more clearly stating your opinions (p. 207). Guzmán is offering this advice to folks familiar with U.S. culture and politics. If you are not sure what words may be inflammatory, consider this an opportunity to ask and clarify your positions further.

### Reflecting on Your Beliefs

Guzmán's primary goal in *I Never Thought of It That Way* is to empower you to have constructive conversations about the controversial topics you care about.

Although her book uses examples from U.S. politics and history, her advice about difficult conversations may be applied to any topic important in other countries, histories, and traditions.

When you participate in controversial conversations on campus, consider that your cultural background and individual experiences can add a new dimension, enriching the discussion by helping your peers think beyond their cultural expectations. We encourage you to recognize the value your perspective brings to such discussions in the Vanderbilt community and hope this recognition will embolden you to share your thoughts.

When you participate in controversial conversations on campus, consider that your cultural background and individual experiences can add a new dimension, enriching the discussion by helping your peers think beyond their cultural expectations. We encourage you to recognize the value your perspective brings to such discussions in the Vanderbilt community and hope this recognition will embolden you to share your thoughts. As Guzmán discusses in the book, you can decide when and how you apply the advice she offers:

"I'm here to help you cross the divides you want to and not the ones you don't. Choosing where to try to span these gulfs, and when, and how, is an entirely personal decision that no one other than you can touch. You should know, though, that this clear, practical truth is tough for me to admit. That's because, to be totally frank with you (and if it isn't already obvious), one of my deepest personal convictions in life is that understanding the people who confound us is always, always worth it." [15]

#### Want to know more?

As you begin to implement Guzmán's advice, consider signing up for our [1-to-1 Consultations](#) for speaking or writing assistance at the English Language Center. In your appointment, you can practice your conversation skills, including the phrases listed in our infographic, or review your writing. If you are hesitating to discuss or write about a controversial topic, some practice at the ELC can help you gain confidence., or review your writing. If you are hesitating to discuss or write about a controversial topic, some practice at the ELC can help you gain confidence.



#### Focus on...

Reflect on your cultural, linguistic, and educational background:

- How do you want to apply Guzmán's advice?
- What controversial topics are important to you?

If you'd like to explore your beliefs and reflect on what drives them, you can take the [Schwartz Value Survey](#). Guzmán shares on page 169.



## Summary

We hope you are ready to implement our advice as you continue reading *I Never Thought of It That Way*. As needed, refer to this guide to develop your reading skills throughout your time at Vanderbilt. For further guidance from the English Language Center, sign up for [1-to-1 Consultations](#) while classes are in session. If you have questions, please contact [elc@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:elc@vanderbilt.edu).