Diagramming an Academic Article

Diagramming an article may seem like a daunting process. How do you follow the logic and argument of a piece? How can you synthesize information from 30+ pages into 1-2? To help guide you through this process, I provide a list of questions to answer and a template for thinking through how to organize an argument diagram below. This is not universally applicable but should serve as a good starting place for reading most academic articles in the social sciences.

Questions for guiding argument analysis:

1. When was this published? (TITLE)
2. What is the research question? (INTRO)
3. What purpose does the author(s) claim this research serves? (INTRO)
4. Why did the author(s) pick the case/cases they do? If they picked more than one case, what comparative leverage do the multiple cases offer? (CASE HISTORY)
5. What theoretical framework does the author(s) use? Why? Which major literatures are they drawing on? What debates are they speaking to? (THEORY)
6. What hypotheses do the author(s) test? Pick the three most important if the paper tests more than one. (THEORY)
7. What is the dependent variable? What is the independent variable? (THEORY/METHODS)
8. Which method(s) does the author(s) use? Why? How does this method offer insight into the research question they ask? (METHODS)
9. How does the author(s) measure the concepts that are central to the hypotheses they test? (METHODS)
10. What do the author(s) find? Which hypotheses are supported and which are not? (FINDINGS)
11. How does the author(s) connect the findings to the theory they use? (DISCUSSION)
12. Are you convinced that the argument the author(s) is making is supported by the evidence they present?

Argument Diagram Template:

Research Question→ relevant theory (and potential answers to the question posed)→ hypotheses (and connection to case)→ measurement→methods→ findings→connection to theory (step by step by step). See image below.

Introduction: Identify QUESTION, outline ARGUMENT and THEORY, provide MAP of paper

Case History: Basic FACTS, TIMELINES, and CASE-SPECIFIC Terms

Theory: Define CONCEPTS in the abstract (quote theorist), Define CONCEPTS in relation to CASE

Case History and Theory are the toolkits that you give your reader to understand your argument

Findings Theme 3: What does Theory tell us about CASE? What is your ARGUMENT?

Findings Theme 2: What does Theory tell us about CASE? What is your ARGUMENT?

Findings Theme 1: What does Theory tell us about CASE? What is your ARGUMENT?

Conclusion: Brief overview and reminder of ARGUMENT. Speculate on the FUTURE and MEANING of your point

Remember to cite your sources, relax, take breaks, sleep, take care of yourself, and proofread. A paper is incomplete without a title, citations, and page numbers!