

Source Function BINGO

Alexander K. Davis

Elevate the structure and source use in students' social-scientific research papers through a surprising tactic: a game of bingo!

Writing Focus: *sources, structure, conventions*

Project Stage: *drafting, revising*

Teacher Preparation: *low*

Student Preparation: *high*

Estimated Time: *60 minutes*

Home Discipline: *Sociology*

EXERCISE

Prep Work: For pre-class reading assign a model publication from a peer-reviewed journal, one that features elegant and effective secondary source integration. It's also helpful to incentivize careful reading with an "active reading" worksheet: one that asks students to restate the article's motive and thesis in their own words, describe the role each subsection plays in developing the argument, and (most importantly) flag one or two instances of source use in each subsection that they find effective.

Bring copies of the attached BINGO card to class. Students should bring the model text (with active reading handout, if using) and drafts of their working research papers.

Step One: (15 minutes) Frame the workshop: explain that rather than discussing the homework reading's conceptual content, as is often the case in a Sociology seminar, today's session will be devoted to uncovering how published scholarship can serve as an excellent model for their own writing—especially when it comes to effectively integrating *sources*.

To that end, set students to work reviewing the model text's overarching line of argument. Divide students into as many groups as there are subsections of the text (typically five in sociology: introduction, literature review, data and methods, results and analysis, and conclusion) and assign one section to each group. Ask them to grapple with a deceptively simple question: what's the relationship between their subsection and the full paper's motive and thesis?

After a few minutes have passed, invite each group to share their observations. Map their contributions on the board, drawing particular attention to student comments about the complexity of structure and argumentation in their respective subsections.

Step Two: (15 minutes) From there, delve deeper into dissecting the model text—focusing on *source use*. Send students back into their groups and have them interrogate two or three instances of source use in their assigned subsection (which can be the examples they flagged for

homework): how do the paper's secondary sources support, extend, complicate, or in some way *add* to each section's contribution to the full paper's line of argument?

After a few minutes have passed, invite each group to share again. Add to the argument map on the board, this time emphasizing how the structural complexity from step one rests on a foundation of diverse and dynamic engagement with other scholars' published ideas.

Step Three: (25 minutes) Next, introduce a more abstract principle: although secondary sources serve many ends within each section of a sociological research paper, they *also* work together toward a common aim. For an introduction, sources **B**egin an article with a motivating puzzle or problem; for a literature review, they **I**ntroduce and orient a reader to the existing scholarly conversation on a paper's topic; for the methods section, they **N**ame strategies for analysis; for that analysis, they **G**uide a reader's understanding with complicating key terms or concepts; and for a conclusion, they allow an author to momentarily **O**ppose their analysis with an explicit counterargument. In short: BINGO!

Distribute the BINGO card and ask students to fetch drafts of their research papers. Then, issue them a challenge: they have twenty minutes to complete their BINGO cards. But exhort them to read carefully—this BINGO card requires them to scour their work for the *absence* of each BINGO function. Set a timer and circulate to troubleshoot while students work.

Step Four: (5 minutes) Finally, have students debrief with a partner. Close out the session by asking them to jot down a list of source-related revision priorities.

REFLECTIONS

Students in Sociology courses are often quick to point out a published article's limitations or problematic assumptions—but they're typically much less inclined to *believe* in an article's usefulness as much as they *doubt* its conclusions. Source Function BINGO, then, is actually three lessons woven into one. First, structure: the initial discussion reminds students that *every* subsection of a piece of sociological writing should have a dynamic and self-standing line of argument. Second, source use: step two prompts recognition that “the scholarly conversation” should shape *all* sections of a full-length research paper. The third, and most important, lesson is one in *reading* like a scholar: by focusing on the successes (and conventions) of published scholarship and using those boons as an evaluation scheme for one's own sociological writing.

Given this tripartite character, each step of the exercise could easily be extended or used in isolation. In step one, for instance, be prepared for students to need a few minutes to tap into the hidden argumentative complexity in each subsection of the model text. But once they identify that secret, expect their small group conversation to crescendo—and know that providing them with 30 minutes to more fully map the twists and turns of a line of argument can be wonderfully generative in its own right. Similarly, for students who have assembled, say, an annotated bibliography (or who are working with a set of curated sources), step three works quite well as a brainstorming exercise. Simply change the questions in the leftmost cell of the BINGO card so that students allocate sources to each of the columns and reflect on why those allocations are

best. Just be sure to leave some time for discussion and reflection about any empty columns at the end. The to-do list required in step four often becomes a treasured resource for students as they move forward with their research, whether they're planning their next move through library databases or refining a methods section that they've already drafted.

As my students attest, however, this lesson is most successful as an integrated step toward revision. Even for senior sociology majors willing to believe that professional sociological writing is, in theory, a worthy model for their own work, the bar set by real peer-reviewed publications can seem too lofty to be practical. By breaking down the process of mimicry into digestible steps and a straightforward checklist, though, novice and advanced students alike come to see such emulation as possible—even exciting. First-year students tend to be particularly enthusiastic about learning to do more with sources than “prove” their thesis “right,” and juniors and seniors are often grateful for help in taking their source use beyond “sociologists know X and Y but haven’t studied Z.” Plus, students of all levels benefit from the opportunity to get their raw (and much more imaginative!) thinking into a draft *before* they double back to diversify the source use in their final submissions.

Because of those myriad benefits, the core elements of this lesson would also find a suitable home in many other disciplinary settings. For students with more quantitative or scientific predilections who might object that “the data” or “the literature” can “speak for themselves,” the dissection of published scholarly work from steps one and two can be revelatory. And although the appended BINGO card assumes the five-section format conventional in the social and natural sciences, it’s also ripe for adaptation to fields with thematic (or no) sub-headers. For example, in my first-year writing seminar, which takes an interpretive rather than positivist stance, I use a BINGO card whose five functions are “**B**egin with motive,” “**I**llustrate with evidence,” “**N**ame a key term,” “**G**uide your reader’s attention with orienting,” and “**O**ppose with a counterargument.” Students simply evaluate their work for the absence of sources one paragraph at a time, rather than one full subsection at a time.

One could even craft a finer-grained BINGO card to speak to a particular subsection of a research paper. For seniors working on literature reviews for a major capstone project, for instance, one could “**B**egin with a leading theoretical paradigm,” “**I**ntroduce the literature specific to your topic,” “**N**ame a second, complicating literature,” “**G**uide your reader to a new theoretical framework,” and “**O**ppose with a counterargument from a competing perspective.”

But no matter what, keeping the BINGO moniker is crucial. The acronym itself has a wonderfully resinous character, as evinced by the many students who organically leverage our BINGO vocabulary later in the semester, and the small element of gamification is irresistible to first-year students and second-semester seniors alike.

B Begin with MOTIVE	I Introduce the literature with ORIENTING	N Name a METHODOLOGY	G Guide with KEY TERMS	O oppose with a COUNTERARGUMENT
<p>Are there paragraphs / sentences which could benefit from integrating a(n additional) secondary source?</p> <p>If so, where?</p> <p>How exactly would the addition of a(nother) secondary source bolster my intellectual work in that section?</p>				