

## Arguments about Deletion: Guiding New Users in Making Good Arguments

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### Motivation

To maintain a peer production system such as Wikipedia, content must be evaluated and sometimes deleted. Encouraging newcomers is vital to maintaining the health of the encyclopedia, yet the deletion process is confusing and discouraging to new users, who are more difficult to retain if their first article is deleted [1]. Previous research has suggested socializing newcomers about deletion, in part because decisions made with the participation of newcomers are more likely to be reversed [2].

### Goals

- Understand the arguments made in deletion discussions
- Develop argument templates which show the structure of good arguments--for either keeping or deleting content.
- Provide guidance and support for new users in structuring arguments according to Wikipedia's rhetorical standards

### A Typical Argument

One typical reason for deleting a Wikipedia article is that the topic does not deserve to be covered: it is not notable.

**Heath Totten** [edit]

Heath Totten (edit | talk | history | links | watch | logs) – (View log)  
 (Find sources: "Heath Totten" – news · books · scholar · free images)

**Non-notable** 32-year old, free agent, minor league baseball pitcher who hasn't played since 2008. His 66-73 record is far from stellar and, in my opinion, does not merit an article. Alex (talk) 22:13, 29 January 2011 (UTC)

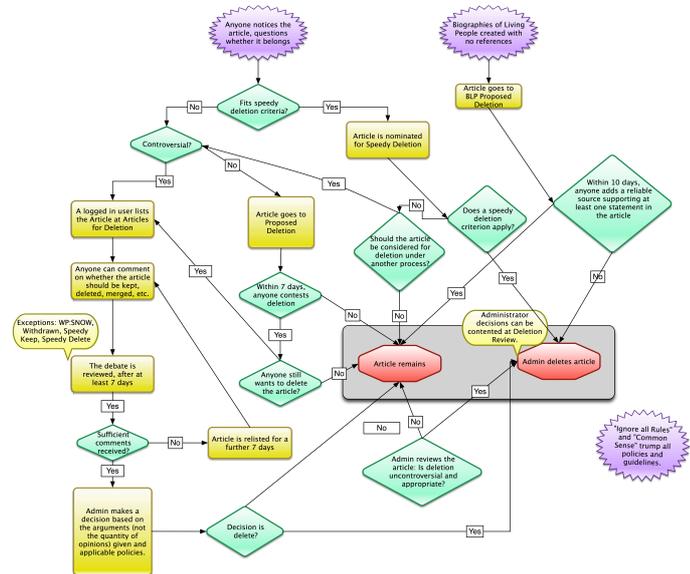
- **Keep** "hasn't played since 2008" His page at the official Minor League Baseball website [1] states that his status is "Active". It also states that he has pitched as recently as December 29, 2010. He is playing for Bravos de Margarita in the Venezuelan League - the highest professional league in the country of Venezuela. Some of his teammates this past year are major league players. [The second guideline of the baseball notability guidelines: "Have appeared in at least one game in ... any other top-level national league."] Having played in the top professional league of Venezuela, I feel he qualifies. Kinston eagle (talk) 22:38, 29 January 2011 (UTC)

Part of a deletion discussion in Wikipedia's "Articles for deletion"

Arguments given in deletion discussions may involve:

1. Assertions of the appropriate policy to apply  
*baseball notability guidelines*
2. References to specific criteria in a policy  
*Have appeared in at least one game in ... any other top-level national league*
3. Facts sourced to an external reference  
*playing for Venezuela's highest professional league*
4. Interpretations and conclusions  
*I feel he qualifies*

This is an *argument from rules* based on the *baseball notability guidelines*. The strongest arguments use policies and make their inferences explicit.



The complexity of Wikipedia's article deletion workflow  
 Image credit: Jodi Schneider and Alexandre Passant

### Templating Arguments

60 main argument types have been identified and classified [3]. Not all types meet community standards.

Accepted arguments:

- from rules

Not accepted:

- from popular opinion
- from position to know

Sometimes accepted/supplementary:

- from waste
- from sunk costs

### Methodology & Ongoing Work

Our methods include

- Investigating novice & experienced argumentation with
  - Content analysis
  - Quantitative analysis
  - Interviews
- Annotating a corpus of Wikipedia argumentation
- Documenting a taxonomy of user needs in deletion cases
- Evaluating argument assistance interventions
  - Providing prominent checklists of evaluation criteria
  - Automatically identifying inappropriate rhetoric

### References

- [1] Fighting the decline by restricting article creation? Wikipedia Signpost, 4 April 2011. [http://enwp.org/WP:Wikipedia\\_Signpost/2011-04-04/Editor\\_retention](http://enwp.org/WP:Wikipedia_Signpost/2011-04-04/Editor_retention)
- [2] S. K. Lam, J. Karim, and J. Riedl. The effects of group composition on decision quality in a social production community. In GROUP '10, pages 55–64, 2010. ACM.
- [3] D. Walton, C. Reed, and F. Macagno. Argumentation Schemes. Cambridge, 2008.