

America History & Life: building up a complex search

This screencast will show you how to use “Search History” facility in the *America History & Life* to recombine your search and come up with a more complex search.

Let’s say, for instance, that you are looking for material on the topic of prohibition, temperance, and rum-running, but you are not really sure what search terms to use. You may start by searching for the word “prohibition” and just do a very broad search for that term. The search brings you 1413 results. If you run a search for the term “temperance,” you get 1121 results. A search for rum-running finds you 16 results. This is a very simple example. We now have three different searches that we have sent to the database each of which has brought back a separate set of results. Some results will overlap, but if you can gather these three searches together, you can work with them more efficiently.

What you want to do is click on “Search History.” “Search History” takes you to a screen where every search that you have sent in this session is recorded. The first search was for “prohibition,” the second search was for “temperance,” and the third search was for “rum-running.” By clearing out the content in the upper part of the screen, you can recombine your searches. If you wanted to combine them all with the operator OR in order to link them, you are looking for either “prohibition,” OR “temperance,” OR “rum-running.” This will result in the broadest possible search. You can recombine the searches by choosing to search with the Boolean operator OR. The combined search comes up with the total of 2290 results.

You can also throw another term into your original search. If you are especially interested in Canada as a geographic term you can search within those 2290 results. Now, our search brings us 190 results for our three terms--“prohibition,” “temperance,” and “rum-running”--and the geographical descriptor Canada.

You can also save your search and set up an alert so that if anything new is added to the database that satisfies the criteria of your search you will be e-mailed those results.

Remember to use the “Search History” to build up a more comprehensive search, to get to a facility where you can save searches, and to set up an alert so that you will be e-mailed whenever new material that satisfies your search criteria is added to the database.