Have to do a critical review of the literature and don't know where, or how, to start? Here are some things you can do to help you to organise and evaluate what you read.

In the beginning:

- Choose your book carefully
- Read actively and critically
- Focus first on summary analysis:
  - Before you read write down some of the facts you already know about the topic;
  - Survey the book to make some predictions

Some questions to ask:

- What does the title promise the book will cover or argue?
- What does the preface promise about the book?
- What does the TOC tell you about how the book is organized?
- Who’s the audience for the book?

As you read:

Individual chapters

- Think carefully about the title and skim to get an overall sense of the chapter
- As you read test your predictions
- After you've finished take notes.
  - First summarize the main points of the chapter.
  - Then make brief notes about particular passages you might discuss in your review.
Begin to evaluate

As you take notes, try dividing your page into two columns. In the left, summarize main points from a chapter. In the right, record your reactions to, and tentative evaluations of, that point.

Some ways you can evaluate a book:

If you know other books on the subject:
- Compare their arguments with the book you are reading.
- What’s new/what’s especially valuable about this book?

If you don’t know other books on this subject you could ask, for example:
- How well does the book fulfil the promises set out in the preface and introduction?
- How effective is the book’s methodology?
- How effectively does the book make its argument?
- How persuasive is the evidence?
- For its audience, what are the book’s strengths?
- How clearly is the book written?

Other useful resources:

Websites:  http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/litrev.html
http://www.library.cqu.edu.au/litreviewpages/tips.htm

LL&RS Workshops: see website at www.studentservices.uwa.edu.au/learning

Other Survival guides – “Effective Reading”


http://www.studentservices.uwa.edu.au/information_for/students/learning

Email: study.smarter@uwa.edu.au
Ph: (08) 6488 2423
Fax: (08) 6488 1119
Visit Student Services – 2nd Floor Guild Building