For the sake of simplicity a normal not systemic or integrative literature review will be described these links above all lead to comprehensive guides to other types of literature reviews. (Cronin et al, 2008)

1. Choosing a topic

The first step in any literature review is choosing a topic for a standalone piece this is like any research choose a topic you find interesting and is manageable. If it is integrated in a project obviously the topic is whatever your project is about. While choosing the topic make sure it’s specific enough that you can do the research in the time that is allowed for it rather than a general such as e.g. pain but not too specific that you can’t find anything on it.

2. Searching

When you have decided on a topic start searching for information on it. Remember to search wide for it can include academic articles and books but also grey literature such as government reports. Remember when doing this to read both the title and abstracts of any articles you find to make sure they are relevant to your topic if they have no relevance or are only vaguely relevant don’t use them. If you are finding it difficult to find items you can broaden the search out but for a research project you are trying to find gaps in the field if you can’t find any sources that can be useful to know especially for a theses.

3. Analysis

Now that you have found relevant sources the next step is to analyse them and note their quality and usefulness to your research. There is many ways to do it but one way recommended by (Coughlan, 2008) suggests you use the pqrs (preview, question, read, summarize) to classify the documents, doing this will make the full critical analysis easier later on and will cut out any articles which on a second glance aren’t that relent to your topic. Remember on a literature review non primary research e.g. other literature review or trade publications may be used as well as these sources if they are relevant because of this different criteria need to be used to judge their quality as can be seen below. This is a good starting point but if you find this too basic other criteria can be found in different textbooks and here. Choose which suits you but choose ones that allow you to fully critically analyse the sources. Also begin to draw connections between the articles and start thinking where your piece work might slot into and what gaps there are.

4. Write the Review
The final phase is to simply write the review. The first part being an introduction that usually an introductory paragraph, whether you treat it as a subheading is dependent on whether or not it is standalone or not, but the introduction should be an explanation of the problem and at least some idea of the search strategy you used to find the sources. In the main body is where the literature should be fully reviewed. It depends on what you find but a good way to lay this out is through thematic paragraphs with each one dealing with a different theme. E.g. a certain type of care program may have sections suggesting what is good about the program and what can be improved or staffing the programming. There is usually a seminal piece of research in the fields and this should be wrote about in detail but it should be noted that this in depth study is only for a select few papers as you should avoid your literature review turning into a description of a series of studies. Remember the idea is to get a broad overview of the field and synthesise them. In the end evaluating the studies and showcasing where there is a lack of valuable information in the field is the main goal. Try to avoid being conclusive in stating the accuracy of results and be more tentative but try to get a good balance. Using should be a good starting point but remember there is many ways of doing it check out the books to the side or the links below to find a method that suits you.