A literature review is an iterative process, which you control yourself. You can execute the following steps to make sure that you have performed a thorough literature review. Of course, the writing process cannot be (entirely) separated from this.

Subject selection
Search for a subject that makes you feel enthusiastic. Look on the Internet, social media, news(papers), journal articles, textbooks or reference works.

Frame your research question
Narrow your subject and divide your research question by any sub-questions. Look for aspects that interest you in the literature relevant to your discipline.

Define key terms and synonyms
Check a reference work e.g. Wikipedia, a dictionary and review academic articles in order to familiarise yourself with your subject. Note key subject terms and their synonyms.

Determine publication type
What publication type provides the information you need? I.e. are you looking for news, scientific information or e.g. quantitative data?

Select a search tool
What search tool do you need? A search engine, a bibliographic- or numerical database (e.g. Google Scholar, RUQuest, PubMed, Orbis, Hudoc, Web of Science)?

Search
Search systematically; combine key subject terms and synonyms with the correct search operators. Evaluate results based on quantity & quality. Revise your search as you see fit. Search for, or follow citations, i.e. check reference lists of an article or book for recent developments or the bigger picture. You could also check whether an article of your interest is being cited in other publications.

Document
Record your search strategy e.g. search terms, search options, search filters, search operators etc. Collect your references with a reference tool such as Endnote, Mendeley or Zotero.

More Info?
- Check our e-learning site ru.nl/library/elite for learning more!
- Take our quiz ‘How to avoid plagiarism’ or check this video.
- For help with writing your paper, thesis or other assignment, contact the Nijmegen Centre for Academic writing.