Searching and reviewing the literature (Hart, 2005, pp.155-156).

Basic Questions to ask:

1. What research and theory is there on my topic?
2. What are the key sources (books, articles, reports, etc.) on my topic?
3. Who are the main theorists and researchers in this area?
4. What is the language of my topic and how is it used?
5. What is the history, chronological development, of the topic or problem?

Intermediate questions to ask:

1. How has the topic or problem been defined?
2. What are the different frames of reference for researching and discussing the topic?
3. How has theory been related to practice or to empirical research?
4. What methodological assumptions and approaches have been used?
5. What key concepts, variables or factors have been identified?
6. What are the agreements and disagreements between theorists on my topic?
7. What gaps in knowledge, theory or application of a methodology are there in my topic area?

As you gather a better understanding of your topic you will be able to interrogate your sources to find answers to the following questions:

1. What inconsistencies, shortcomings or contradictions are there in our knowledge of the topic?
2. What evidence is lacking, inconclusive or too limited?
3. What alternative approaches are there for understanding the topic which have not been used?

Hart, C. (2005). *Doing your masters dissertation: Realizing your potential as a social scientist*. London: Sage Publications.