From Cluster to Mind Map

Finding the structure of an emerging text can be difficult. Rather than worrying about it and not getting anywhere it can help you to take an unstructured and spontaneous approach and then finding a structure for your notes in a next step. Try this:

1. Clustering:

A cluster is an associative writing technique that goes back to Gabriele L. Rico. The idea is to develop a spontaneous network of ideas as a basis for a coherent text. It works like this:

- Take a blank sheet of at least A4 size (landscape format)
- Write a core word for your cluster in the center and circle it. The core word describes the topic of your cluster.
- Starting from this core word you form chains of association: Write down the first word that comes to mind, circle it and link the two circles with a line. Continue.
- Once you reach the end of your sheet or if you feel that you are now thinking of a different idea you start at the core word again and form a new chain of association.
- Work spontaneously and quickly. Don't judge your ideas – keep your hand in motion. You don't need to structure and sort your ideas. If a structure originates, that's ok, but it doesn't have to.
- Usually the flow of ideas starts to ebb after five or ten minutes. Then take a look at your cluster.

2. Finding a structure:

- Take a colour pencil and mark the ideas that seem particularly important.
- Decide on three to five main points and number them in order to determine a sequence.
- Transfer your main points into a mind map in which you can subdivide these further. You may find these sub points in your cluster or you can start a new cluster on these to refine your first rough structure.

If you are comfortable in working with mind maps you can assign references from your literature search to the individual points to plan your further research and reading / evaluation of literature.
It makes sense to cluster by hand as this usually makes it more spontaneous and intuitive. For mind mapping, you may want to use software.