PREVIEWING A BOOK

Who is the author & what does his/her background tell you about the book?

Is there a list of other titles by the same author? Any worth getting?

When was the book published? Who published it? Why might these matter?

Skim the table of contents. Which chapters seem most useful to your project?

Skim the index. What key words stand out as especially relevant? What pages?

Skim the bibliography. Find any sources there that might be worth reading?
Skim the intro/preface, paying special attention to the beginning and end. (If someone else wrote it, note that and search for any of his or her publications later. S/he may be important in the field.)

Does there seem to be a core argument? What is it?

Is there an articulated reason for research/research question? What is it?

Do you see evidence of “They Say”s to which the author is responding? What are they?

Does the text seem too specialized and difficult for you to understand? Do you need to chuck it? Or what specifically will you need to familiarize yourself with in order to understand it?

Jot down the key terms in the table of contents, the last paragraphs of the intro, and the index. These may be useful search terms or subject headings to explore later.