

**scripta 15.1: Tacitus discusses the challenges of writing history**

*This text is taken from Tacitus, Annals 4.33. Tacitus reflects on the challenges facing a writer of contemporary history: the historians who wrote about events from long ago were able to focus on delighting their reader and they were at liberty to colour their history without fearing the personal bias of their readers.*

*In contrast, as a writer of contemporary history, Tacitus thinks that he has to deal with content which is unrelenting in its bleakness and with a readership who are too close to the reality of what he describes not to be personally impacted by his choice of what to praise or to criticise.*

It's the geographical location of tribes, battles of different types and the famous deaths of generals which capture the attention and keep the minds of the readers engaged. In contrast I am knitting together savage edicts, never-ending accusations, friendships which could not be trusted, the destruction of men who did not deserve it and always the same reasons for their death. Then there is the fact that it's rare to find anyone who objects to the ancient writers, and it does not matter much to anyone whether you present the Carthaginian or Roman battle lines in a more sparkling fashion. But the descendants are still alive today of many of the men who were punished or humiliated when Tiberius held power; even when the actual families have now died out, you will still find men who, because they have similar characteristics, think that the bad actions of others are held out as criticisms directed at themselves. Even glory and praise make readers hostile, since it creates too clear a contrast with the opposite actions.

- 1) According to Tacitus, what engages the interest of readers?
- 2) What does Tacitus say he will be writing about instead?
- 3) Explain why Tacitus thinks that writing about recent events is unlikely to please his audience. Why do you think he chose this content despite these challenges?