**A few tips on answering 10 mark mini-essay questions:**

1. This is a general question, inviting knowledge of the sections of the set text you have read.
2. The best way to prepare for this question is to:
	1. read through the whole text in English after you have gone through it in Latin, to make sure you remember what happens in each section we have covered;
	2. try to think about any themes which strike you as you read through the text.
3. You MUST answer the question: if you have excellent points but they are not relevant to the question set, leave them out.
4. The question says that you may refer to the passages printed in the exam paper, but you MUST also refer to other parts of theset text you have read, which do not appear in the question paper.
5. References to the text in this question DO NOT need to be in Latin – you can quote short references in ENGLISH.  If you happen to remember a couple of bits of Latin (or there are relevant bits within the passages printed in the exam paper), by all means put them in, but ALWAYS TRANSLATE THEM INTO ENGLISH TOO, TO SHOW YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT THE TEXT MEANS!
6. If you cannot remember the Latin, it is fine to paraphrase the English of the translation; but try to stick as closely as possible to the translation and to include as many details as possible. And make sure that it is sufficiently detailed to be able to recognise which bit of the text you are referring to!
7. In this question, try to think in terms of THEMES, rather than specific, individual quotations. The Examiners’ Report for June 2013 has the following to say about this: *“Quite a number [of candidates] did not really grasp the broader approach that is need in this question and so concentrated heavily on slight observations or narrow stylistic points which tended to reprise answers given earlier in the paper.”*
8. Set out your answer clearly: for example, if the question asks for your opinion on some statement about the storyline / plot / characters, try to argue why one might agree with the statement; then why one might disagree; then draw a conclusion based on the evidence you have presented.
9. If your answer falls into a discussion of various themes, I would start a new paragraph for each theme, to make it clear that you have made a variety of points and covered a variety of themes.
10. For this question, it is enough to make FIVE TO SIX POINTS. Note that a good point may require two or three separate references to the text, so you may have ten to twelve quotations or short paraphrases – though these references to the text may be only one or two words long!
11. For each point you make, make sure you include a decent discussion of how your quotations/ references to the text relate to the question.  ALWAYS LEAD YOUR DISCUSSION BACK TO THE QUESTION!
12. The more references to the text you can make in this question, the better. Remember that one of the main things it is testing is how well you know the set text as a whole.
13. You don’t have to write a lot in this answer – it is about quality and clarity rather than quantity of argument.  Clear points, logical arguments which answer the question and a good number of close references to the text will gain high marks in this question.

Mini essay

Responses are credited for AO2 for the detail and accuracy of the knowledge of the set text they deploy and for their understanding of the set text(s).

Responses are credited for AO3 for how well the response addresses the question, for candidates selecting relevant examples from the set texts they have studied and drawing and expressing conclusions based on the selected examples in relation to the question posed. Candidates will be assessed on the quality of the conclusions and points they argue and the range and quality of the examples they have selected.

10-mark grid for the extended response question

AO2 = 5 marks = Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of literature

AO3 = 5 marks = Analyse, evaluate and respond to literature

Characteristics of performance

• detailed knowledge and excellent understanding of the set text (AO2)

• well-argued response to the question which is supported by a range of well-selected examples from the set text (A03)

Always make sure you have a good range of evidence from beginning, middle and end. Bear in mind that the question may also ask you to consider REGULUS.

**9-10 marks. Band 5, top band**

The response is logically structured, with a well-developed, sustained and coherent line of reasoning.

Good knowledge and sound understanding of the set text (AO2) .

A good response to the question which is supported by some well-selected examples from the set text (A03)

**Do you think that we should view Piso as negatively as Tacitus does?**

*In your answer you may refer to the passages printed in this question paper, but you should also refer to other parts of the prescribed text that you have read.* [10]

You can construct your argument either way. Here is a guide to some points you might make.

Points in support of an answer that we should be MORE sympathetic to Piso than Tacitus allows.

Points in support of an answer that we should be LESS sympathetic to Piso, i.e. agree with Tacitus.

STATEMENT

Tacitus wishes us to believe that he knows exactly what Gnaeus Piso is doing. But it turns out to be true, in so far as we can tell.

EXAMPLE (paraphrase of the text is fine)

So that Piso might start his plans to thwart Germanicus more quickly, he bribes the most disreputable of the soldiers, gets rid of the experienced, disciplined leaders, and allows slackness and hooliganism.

EXPLANATION

How does he know this? These things could be happening but not because of Piso (though if commanders were dismissed, this would be a matter of record.) What sources of information could he have? Is this spreading rumour rather than fact?

\*We are later told that in court the defence could NOT refute these charges; thus we learn they are true.

STATEMENT

His wife seems to be working in conjunction with Gnaeus Piso to undermine.

EXAMPLE (paraphrase of the text is fine)

“Plancina, Piso’s wife, did not act as befitted a lady: she used to attend the cavalry exercises”, ?ogling the muscular soldiers as they train. Naughty.

Agrippina: the highest nobility, a most splendid marriage

EXPLANATION

This could be rumour and looks like personal insult. How do we know Plancina agreed with Piso? Plancina is cast by Tacitus as the evil opposite of noble Agrippina. This looks very schematic, i.e. symbolic and simplified, too neat.

STATEMENT

Tacitus insinuates much without giving hard evidence in the case of *poison.*

EXAMPLE (paraphrase of the text is fine)

“Germanicus’ belief that poison had been received from Piso increased the terrible virulence of his illness.”

EXPLANATION

There is no evidence beyond Tacitus’ persuasive rhetoric of Piso’s complicity in Germanicus’ death. Notice the word of general *innuendo* and suggestion: “belief” (*persuasion*). Belief, not hard fact.

\*In court we learn that: *solum veneni crimen potuit Piso diluere* – Piso was (only) able to refute the charge of poison. Though Tacitus add in ONLY still to attack Piso! And possibly this clarification of Piso’s innocence comes too late in the story to be effective: he has already poured poison in our ears.[[1]](#footnote-1)

STATEMENT

Tacitus accentuates the horror of sorcery but nothing can be definitely attributed to Piso’s agency.

EXAMPLE (paraphrase of the text is fine)

Disinterred remains of human bodies were being found, spells and curses and the name of Germanicus inscribed on lead tablets were found, and also charred cremated remains smeared with rotten flesh and other pieces of sorcery.

EXPLANATION

Notice that while Tacitus shows he thinks this kind of belief is mumbo-jumbo, he still uses it to damn Piso. He gives grotesque details in a catalogue, savouring the ghoulishness. Anyone could have put this stuff there to scare Germanicus. And anyway, it’s not like a knife or sword!

\*Tacitus milks the spooky bit for all he can. In court these charges – though dubious – still remain:

 “After they had performed rites and unspeakable sacrifices...”

STATEMENT STATEMENT

He insinuates there were ulterior motives on Piso’s part.

EXAMPLE (paraphrase of the text is fine)

“At the same time, people sent by Piso were being accused of awaiting signs of ill health.”

EXPLANATION

Piso might genuinely have wanted to know if G was getting better. *Were being accused* is not proof. And who was doing the accusing?

\*There’s other evidence of hatred.

STATEMENT

Germanicus is portrayed as a hero, a second Alexander the Great. He makes an emotional speech. (In reality he might be regarded as an ambitious and awkward/subversive figure.)

EXAMPLES (paraphrase of the text is fine)

‘You will avenge me, if you used to love me rather than my rank and success.’

‘there was tremendous grief throughout the province and the surrounding peoples.’

‘And there were those who compared him to Alexander the Great on account of his appearance, short life, manner and the place of his death.’

EXPLANATION

Tacitus cannot have known exactly what he said but such words whip up animosity against Piso in the reader as well as among the people round the death-bed. Ratchets up the pathos of G’s demise.

STATEMENT

He insinuates there were ulterior motives on Piso’s part and makes connections which might not be true.

EXAMPLE (paraphrase of the text is fine)

News of the death: Piso celebrating on the island of Cos, Plancina changing into bright clothing (‘festive attire’).

‘Rejoicing in this, he slaughtered victims and went to temples.’

EXPLANATION

Can we also make this connection or is Tacitus subtly (or brazenly) guiding our view.

‘Rejoicing in this, he slaughtered victims and went to temples.’ = Very brief sentence. He seems to be thanking the gods, but how does \*Tacitus know this (and his mood)?

STATEMENT

Excessive reaction back in Rome.

EXAMPLE (paraphrase of the text is fine)

‘Grief, anger and lamentation began to break out.’

‘A break in legal business was taken, the lawcourts were abandoned and the great houses closed.’

‘After Agrippina had disembarked with her two children, holding the funeral urn and had lowered her eyes, there was the same groan from all.’

EXPLANATION

Tacitus is doing this wants to establish that public sentiment was firmly on the side of G. Fatherless children. Stage-managed for maximum effect but by whom? Agrippina or Tacitus?

STATEMENT

Emperor Tiberius actually makes a point about how good & experienced Piso was. This might be a positive point.

EXAMPLE (paraphrase of the text is fine)

‘Piso was my father’s representative and friend.’

EXPLANATION

Augustus had chosen Piso to be governor (lēgātus) of Hispania Tarraconensis (formerly Nearer Spain), one of the three provinces into which Spain was divided. Then Tiberius sent him out as governor of Syria. In actual fact, it was Germanicus who was the ‘novice, the new boy’.

STATEMENT

Abandonment by Plancina and the sad, noble suicide/end of Piso: Tacitus seems to show some sympathy at the end.

EXAMPLE (paraphrase of the text is fine)

Then in the dead of night, when his wife had left his bedroom, he ordered the door to be closed;

*et prima luce*│ *perfosso iugulo,* │*iacente humi gladio,* │*repertus est.*

‘and at dawn he was found, his throat cut, a sword lying on the ground’

EXPLANATION

Dramatic use of language (STYLE again but hey…!) for sympathetic effect? Despite his hatchet-job on Piso, perhaps Tacitus gives him some credit in the end for a lonely, dignified, noble death.

1. Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole/ With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,/ And in the porches of my ears did pour/ The leperous distilment, whose effect/ Holds such an enmity with blood of man/ That swift as quicksilver it courses through/ The natural gates and alleys of the body/ And with a sudden vigor doth posset/ And curd, like eager droppings into milk,/ The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine. **HAMLET** Act I sc. v [↑](#footnote-ref-1)