

# UW-Marathon County Library Restroom Reader

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## Liberal Education... What does it mean?

What does it mean to be a liberally educated person? It seems such a simple question, especially given the frequency with which colleges and universities genuflect toward this well-worn phrase as the central icon of their institutional missions. Mantra-like, the words are endlessly repeated, starting in the glossy admissions brochures that high school students receive by the hundreds in their mailboxes and continuing right down to the last tired invocations they hear on commencement day. Yet many of us continue to place great stock in these words, believing them to describe one of the ultimate goods that a college or university should serve. So what exactly do we mean by liberal education, and why do we care so much about it?



This is the beginning of an essay written by William Cronon titled “‘Only Connect...’: The Goals of a Liberal Education.” Throughout the essay, Cronon addresses ten qualities that distinguish a liberally educated person.

Can you think of particular examples from your college experience that are reflected in any of these qualities?

**If so, consider entering UWMC’s Liberal Arts Essay Competition!**

The contest is open to UWMC students and asks you to describe a moment from your recent education when you have been most vividly aware of the importance of one of these qualities. Essays should be 1,000-1,250 words and are due by Dec. 31, 2013. **The top three winners from UWMC will win either \$250, \$150, or \$100 and then advance on to the state level where you could win \$2,000.** For more details, see the contest’s website at

[www.uwmc.uwc.edu/libartsessay.html](http://www.uwmc.uwc.edu/libartsessay.html)

## 10 Qualities that Distinguish a Liberally Educated Person

### 1. They listen and they hear

They can follow an argument, track logical reasoning, detect illogic, hear the emotions that lie behind both the logic and the illogic, and ultimately empathize with the person who is feeling those emotions.

### 2. They read and they understand

This too is ridiculously simple to say but very difficult to achieve, since there are so many ways of reading in our world. None of us can possibly master all these forms of “reading,” but educated people should be competent in many of them and curious about all of them.

### 3. They can talk with anyone

Educated people know how to talk. They can give a speech, ask thoughtful questions, and make people laugh.

### 4. They can write clearly and persuasively and movingly

They can express what is in their minds and hearts so as to teach, persuade, and move the person who reads their words.

### 5. They can solve a wide variety of puzzles and problems

They have the ability to look at a complicated reality, break it into pieces, and figure out how it works in order to do practical things in the real world.

### 6. They respect rigor not so much for its own sake but as a way of seeking truth

They understand that knowledge serves values, and they strive to put these two—knowledge and values—into constant dialogue with each other.

### 7. They practice humility, tolerance, and self-criticism

They have the intellectual range and emotional generosity to step outside their own experiences and prejudices.

### 8. They understand how to get things done in the world

The world order is fraught with peril because the power to act in the world can so easily be abused, so we study power and struggle to use it wisely and well.

### 9. They nurture and empower the people around them

Liberally educated people understand that they belong to a community whose prosperity and well-being are crucial to their own, and they help that community flourish by making the success of others possible.

### 10. They follow E.M. Forster’s injunction from *Howards End*: “Only connect...”

More than anything else, being an educated person means being able to see connections that allow one to make sense of the world and act within it in creative ways.

Restroom Readers can be accessed electronically online through the UWMC Library’s homepage.