

OBJECTING TO DISSECTION

The Ethical Science Education Coalition (ESEC) <http://www.neavs.org/campaigns/esec> offers a variety of services to protect students' rights to choose humane alternatives to specimen dissection. This Fact Sheet offers general guidelines intended for students who wish to choose an alternative to specimen dissection. Communication with advisors, teachers, principals, and especially parents, is always an essential component of the dissection choice process.

Start Early

Each student's experience is different when requesting an alternative assignment. One teacher may be supportive, whereas another may refuse to grant an alternative. Although you cannot control your educator's course of action, you can diminish your chances of negative reactions by approaching the subject of alternatives as early as possible. Specimens are often purchased in the winter/spring of the previous year for the following school year. Therefore, the best time to discuss alternative options with your teacher is the school year or semester before your class begins. Also, discuss your feelings about dissection beforehand with parents, family, and friends, so you will be confident and persuasive in expressing your beliefs.

What You Need to Know

Once you have chosen your classes for the following year/semester, visit the science department/advisor and obtain the course description and the name of the course's teacher. Consult the department staff if you are unsure as to whether the course you have selected includes a dissection lab. Do not assume that because dissection is not specifically mentioned that it is not required. Also, ask what type(s) of specimens will be dissected (e.g., cat, fetal pig, frog).

Find Alternatives

ESEC and other animal protection organizations maintain dissection alternative loan libraries and will help you choose the appropriate alternative for your needs. Create a list of alternatives that suit your educational level and meet the course requirements.

Contact Your Teacher/Professor

Inform your educator verbally and *in writing* the semester or year before the course begins. You may want to address these points:

- The reason(s) why you cannot participate in specimen dissection
- Your desire to receive an equivalent experience via an alternative assignment
- If an alternative assignment will be provided
- Your suggestions for possible alternative assignments
- Questions regarding how you will be tested
- Thank the educator for his/her time and consideration

The remainder of the dissection choice process will depend largely on the reactions and decisions of your teacher. Presenting your case in a calm, respectful manner is usually the most successful approach. In many cases, educators are more than willing to accommodate all students. If you do encounter persistent problems, ask your parents/guardians, animal protection organizations, etc., for support and advice. If the situation reaches an impasse, advice from legal counsel may be an option to consider. An excellent general resource on the topic of dissection choice is *Vivisection and Dissection in the Classroom: A Guide to Conscientious Objection* by Gary L. Francione and Anna E. Charlton. Contact ESEC with questions or concerns, and make use of our website neavs.org/campaigns/esec to support your efforts.