

Action Packet for Students

A guide to help students
opt out of dissection



Introduction

This packet is designed to give easy step-by-step instructions to students (like you!) who do not want to participate in the dissection of animals. We have provided you with the tools you need to reach out to your science teacher along with advice on what to do if your teacher is not receptive to your request.

Thank you for taking the time to make the world a better place for animals.

Good luck!

The NAVS Team

How To Opt Out of Dissection

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Start the conversation with your teacher

2

Determine the best path forward

3

Make your case

- Know your rights
- Know the facts
- Build support



Step 1:

Start the conversation with your teacher

- This first step can be the hardest, but it is crucial in determining where your teacher stands on dissection and humane alternatives.
- Many teachers are open minded and want to make sure that their students have a comfortable learning experience. A 2015 NAVS study reported that 88% of teachers surveyed would be willing to provide dissection alternatives if asked.
- If you aren't comfortable bringing up the topic to your teacher face-to-face, you can start with a short email to gauge your teacher's willingness to let you use a dissection alternative.

Sample e-mail to your teacher

Dear [Teacher's Name],

I would like to discuss how I can opt out of the dissection exercises planned for our class. For [personal/moral/religious] reasons, I do not want to participate in dissection and would like to use an appropriate alternative.

Do you have any specific products or solutions that you would approve for my use? If not, will you work with me to identify an acceptable option?

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

Step 2:

Determine the best path forward

After initial conversations with your teacher, there may be a few different ways to proceed:

- Your teacher may already have a preferred dissection alternative for you to use.
- If your teacher will let you use an alternative, but doesn't have a specific solution in mind, you or your teacher can visit [BioLEAP.org](https://www.bioleap.org) to browse the product catalog and choose an alternative.
- If your teacher is not open to using alternatives, try to understand why so that you can prepare some talking points for another conversation. **NOT A WIN...YET!**



Keep reading for tips on persuading your teacher.

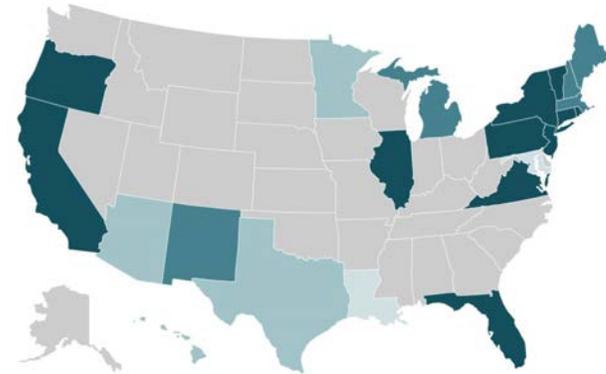
Step 3:

Make your case

Know your rights

- Depending on where you live or what school district you are in, you may already have the right to access dissection alternatives. Visit navs.org to explore your rights.
- No help at the state level? Check your school district website or policy manual for information about the curriculum or how to make complaints about it.

Did you know that 21 states and Washington, DC, have laws that allow students to opt-out of classroom activities?



Step 3:

Make your case

If your state or school district supports your right to opt out of dissection, remind your teacher of this policy

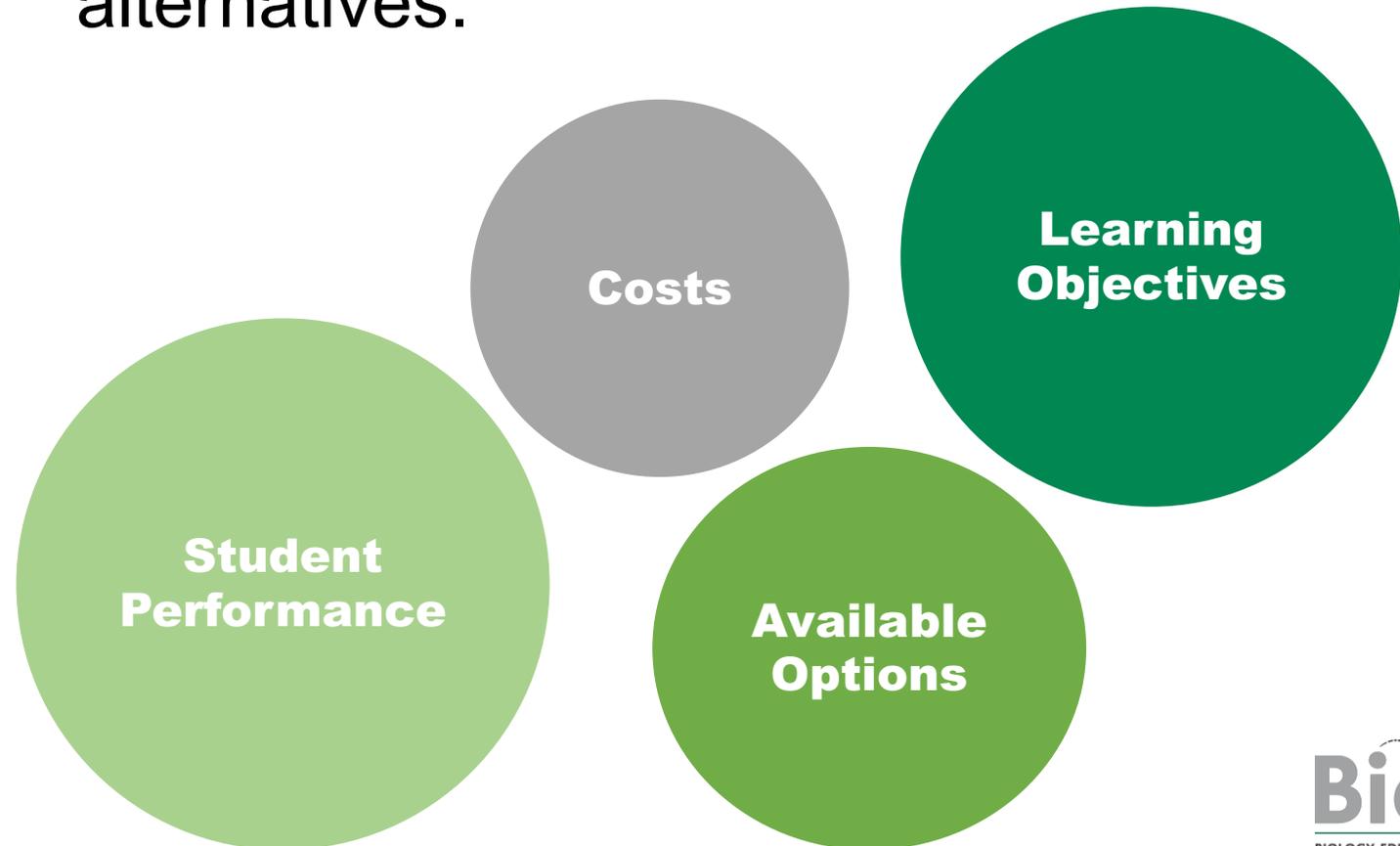
- If you and your parent(s) or guardian(s) aren't being heard, try reaching out to school administrators.
- Good people to contact are the head of the science department, the dean, and the principal.

Step 3:

Make your case

Know the facts

Use the following slides to dispel common misperceptions teachers may have about dissection and humane alternatives.



Know the facts: cost comparison

True or false?

Dissection alternatives are expensive.

FALSE.

Many alternatives are free or less expensive in the long run because they do not have to be repurchased every year like preserved animals do.

See the following slides for examples

Cost comparison: fetal pig

For three classes of 30 students each working in pairs each year (90 students, 45 specimens) for three years

Fetal Pig Dissection: Animal Specimen and Alternative Options

Animal Specimen

Dissection kits (\$12.15 each)	\$546.75
Dissection pans (\$11.95 each)	\$537.75
Specimens (\$29 each)	\$3,915.00
Total	\$4,999.50

Humane Alternatives – Examples

Whitman College Virtual Fetal Pig Dissection	Free	Saves \$4,999.50
eMind Pig Site License (\$199 per year)	\$597.00	Saves \$4,402.50
Scienstructable Fetal Pig Paper Dissection kits (\$16.96 each)	\$763.20	Saves \$4,236.30

Pricing information retrieved from Carolina Biological supplies catalog October 5, 2020. Pricing reflects group discounts and one-time fee for dissection kits and pans.

Cost comparison: frog

For three classes of 30 students each working in pairs each year (90 students, 45 specimens) for three years

Frog Dissection: Animal Specimen and Alternative Options

Animal Specimen

Dissection kits (\$12.15 each)	\$546.75
Dissection pans (\$11.95 each)	\$537.75
Specimens (\$7.25 each)	\$978.75

Total	\$2,063.25
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Humane Alternatives – Examples

eMind Frog Site License (\$199 per year)	\$597.00	Saves \$1,466.25
Scienstructable Frog Paper Dissection kits (\$16.96 each)	\$763.20	Saves \$1,300.05
Virtual Anatomy 3D App – Frog (\$3.50 per student per year)	\$945.00	Saves \$1,118.25

Pricing information retrieved from Carolina Biological supplies catalog October 5, 2020. Pricing reflects group discounts and one-time fee for dissection kits and pans.

Know the facts: educational objectives

True or false?

Dissection alternatives do not provide the same level of learning.

FALSE.

Many studies prove that this is not the case.

One peer-reviewed analysis of 50 published articles compared student learning outcomes with traditional animal specimens and humane alternatives for activities including animal dissection. It revealed that 60% of authors reached the conclusion that there was no real difference in the student learning experience between using traditional animal specimens and humane alternatives, while 30% of authors concluded that alternatives provided a better experience for students (Zemanova 2021).

Know the facts: educational objectives

True or false?

You cannot get hands-on experience from dissection alternatives.

FALSE.

Dissection alternatives take many different forms, some of which include physical models that can be cut open using a scalpel, just like an animal specimen.

Know the facts: cruelty and waste

True or false?

The animals used in dissection are humanely sourced.

FALSE.

Overharvest of frogs for dissection has led to the collapse of entire pond ecosystems (Rosenberger 1998).

Captive raised rodents spend their lives in featureless plastic bins where their complex behavioral needs are neglected.

Euthanasia methods are imperfect, and many animals are injected with formaldehyde and other chemicals before they are completely dead. These chemicals cause harm to the environment when they leach into the ground water from improperly disposed specimens.

Step 3:

Make your case

Build support

If your teacher is unsupportive of your choice not to dissect, then it's time to reach out to people who will have your back:

- Enlist your parent(s) or guardian(s)
 - Some states require the official request of a parent or guardian to secure a student's right not to dissect.
- Ask your classmates if they'd prefer to use an alternative to dissection
 - A 2015 study showed that 37% of students would prefer using dissection alternatives if given the chance (NAVS).
 - There is power in numbers! Draft a letter and get it signed by other students and parents. Sometimes a request that is denied to a single student may be honored if multiple people speak up.

Don't Get Discouraged

If you have exhausted all these avenues and are still unable to use a humane dissection alternative, don't get discouraged. Animal dissection has a long tradition in American classrooms, and change takes time.

For additional resources or advice, please contact NAVS at bioleap@navs.org.

We will do our best to help you reach a conclusion both you and your teacher are happy with.

References

Osenkowski, P., C. Green, A. Tjaden, and P. Cunniff. 2015. "Evaluation of Educator and Student Use of and Attitudes toward Dissection and Dissection Alternatives." *American Biology Teacher*, 77(5); 340-346.

Rosenberger, J. 1998. "Harvest of shame: Dissection's deadly toll hits frogs hardest." *E Magazine*. 9(4), 26-27.

Zemanova, M. and Knight, A. 2021. "The Educational Efficacy of Humane Teaching Methods: A Systematic Review of the Evidence." *Animals*. 11, 114.