

The term anatomy is derived from the Greek word *temnein*, meaning “to cut.” Clearly, therefore, the study of anatomy is linked, at its root, to dissection, although dissection of cadavers by students is now augmented, or even in some cases replaced, by viewing prosected (previously dissected) material and plastic models, or using computer teaching modules and other learning aids. Anatomy can be studied following either a regional or a systemic approach. ■ With a regional approach, each region of the body is studied separately and all aspects of that region are studied at the same time. For example, if the thorax is to be studied, all of its structures are examined. This includes the vasculature, the nerves, the bones, the muscles, and all other structures and organs located in the region of the body defined as the thorax. After studying this region, the other regions of the body (i.e., the abdomen, pelvis, lower limb, upper limb, back, head, and neck) are studied in a similar fashion. ■ In contrast, in a systemic approach, each system of the body is studied and followed throughout the entire body. For example, a study of the cardiovascular system looks at the heart and all of the blood vessels in the body. When this is completed, the nervous system (brain, spinal cord, and all the nerves) might be examined in detail. This approach continues for the whole body until every system, including the nervous, skeletal, muscular, gastrointestinal, respiratory, lymphatic, and reproductive systems, has been studied. Each of these approaches has benefits and deficiencies. The regional approach works very well if the anatomy course involves cadaver dissection but falls short when it comes to understanding the continuity of an entire system throughout the body. Similarly, the systemic approach fosters an understanding of an entire system throughout the body, but it is very difficult to coordinate this directly with a cadaver dissection or to acquire sufficient detail.