

Word for Word

Casual or *causal*?

The words *casual* and *causal* differ in spelling by only the transposition of two letters but have very different meanings.

Casual generally indicates informality or lack of seriousness.

Examples:

The dress code at the restaurant was casual; most diners were wearing jeans.
I considered Dr. Zhu more of a casual acquaintance than a close friend.
The student seemed to have only a casual interest in Dr. Smith's research.

Casual can also describe an event occurring at irregular intervals or at random.

Examples:

Dr. Zahir was a casual contributor to the blog; his posts appeared every few months.

We had a casual meeting in the dining area before the conference started.



Causal, in contrast, is used to indicate cause.

Examples:

Our results indicate that this pathogen is a causal agent of the disease.
Although use of the drug was statistically associated with an increased incidence of high blood pressure, the researchers could not conclude that the drug was a causal factor.

Bibliography

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster; 2003: 193, 196.

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