Word for Word

Simple or *simplistic*?

Although both *simple* and *simplistic* refer to something that is plain or free of complexity, the words have different connotations beyond their definitions.

Something that is *simple* is straightforward or free of complications.
A *simple* procedure is easy to understand and perform, and a *simple* structure is one that is made of basic elements.

Examples:
Monosaccharides are the simplest sugars.
The patient had a simple case of strep throat.

Often associated with negativity, *simplistic* indicates that something is simple to the point of being misleading or oversimplified. A *simplistic* solution does not address the complexities of the problem but rather ignores them.

Example:
To achieve the optimal outcome, we must avoid simplistic solutions.

Describing something as *simplistic* may be viewed as discourteous because of the word's negative connotation. Thus, authors would do well to avoid using *simplistic* when describing other researchers' work or ideas.

References

Garner BA. Garner's Modern American Usage, 4th ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 2016:830.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster; 2003:1162.

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