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Word for Word

Flaunt or *flout*?

Flaunt is not *flout*, despite their similarity and the tendency to swap them, and a careful writer will observe the distinction.

Flout means "to treat with contemptuous disregard," usually said of rules.[1]

Examples:
Tobacco retailers flouted the requirement to display a "Smoking kills" warning sign.
The kindhearted aides flouted the rule about birthday treats for patients.

Flaunt means "to display ostentatiously or impudently" or, when used without a direct object, "to display or obtrude oneself to public notice" or "to wave or flutter showily."[2]

Examples:
Male birds of paradise flaunt their plumage to attract a mate.
The press release flaunted the successes of the new therapy.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary also recognizes an emerging usage of *flaunt* to mean the same as *flout*: "to treat contemptuously"; however, a usage note after the definition warns that many readers will regard that usage as wrong.[2] The newest edition of *Garner's Modern English Usage* similarly advises that this meaning of *flaunt* be avoided.[3] Therefore, in the formal setting of biomedical writing, *flaunt* and *flout* should retain their original, separate meanings.

References

1. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2003:447.
2. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2003:443.
3. Garner BA. Garner's Modern American Usage, 4th ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 2016:394.

--Sarah Bronson, ELS

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