



# Strategies to Get Your Resume Past Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)

## What is an ATS?

ATS stands for applicant tracking system, a software application that may be used in the recruitment process to handle candidate information. Employers use ATS systems to sort and rank resumes submitted (usually online) for employment positions.

## What does that mean for me as a candidate?

If the ATS can't read your resume, or if your resume doesn't match what the ATS is looking for, your application may not be seen by a human, thus making it very difficult to move to the next stage in the hiring process. Understanding ATS is important because it can help you get your resume through the initial software stage; raising your chances of getting an interview.

## Why do companies use an ATS?

Many companies use an ATS to manage the large volume of resumes they receive and to provide a streamlined, first pass-through review of applications. An ATS system can be used to screen resumes for certain keywords and relevant data that hiring managers are seeking. Many large companies use ATS to screen resumes, but some small- to medium-sized companies do, too.

## Can I be sure my resume will pass an ATS screening?

No, there is no way to be sure. Even if you do your best to use the "right" keywords (and you will never really know exactly what search terms have been set, so this is tricky), your resume may still not pass the ATS. However, optimizing your resume with great content, keywords, relevant experience, and really communicating your unique value to a target employer are all GREAT strategies for building a resume that will help you connect with a hiring manager, as well as improving your ATS ranking. Sites like JobScan (<https://www.jobscan.co/>) can help you count keywords in common between your resume and the job posting (JobScan offers 5 free scans a month).

## Skip the ATS screening

Work your contacts, do some targeted networking, and develop advocates in those companies that interest you. If you pass your resume directly to your advocates, you won't have to rely on the ATS to get it into the hands of someone who can actually hire you! Learn how to build and manage your network by visiting our [Networking Resource Page](#)

## 6 Tips for Writing an ATS-friendly Resume:

### 1. Create Two Versions of Your Resume

Create two versions of your resume; one for the “cut and paste into this box” section on an online application, and another that is for human eyes. Some ATS systems are older, or more rigid, and formatting requires some thought. Resumes that are left-justified, with no logos, text boxes, tables, or columns are the easiest ones for a traditional ATS to read. Some more up-to-date systems can handle more variety, but it is hard to know what system you are up against!

### 2. Pack it with Keywords

When an ATS scans your resume, it is looking for whatever search parameters the hiring company has set for a particular position, which would typically include “keywords” – the specific qualifications and experience relevant to the job opening. The job posting is usually a rich source for these keywords. Even for the ATS, content is key! Be sure you tailor your resume to the specific job for which you are applying!

### 3. Make it Relevant

Carefully read the job description of the position you’re apply for and align your resume with the job description. Identify key responsibilities and skills and design your resume accordingly. When creating a relevant resume, consider using the WHO method (What you did, how you did it, and the Outcome) to help employers and/or ATS systems recognize how and why your accomplishments and strengths are important. Learn more about the WHO method by visiting our [Resume Resource Page](#) and reading the WHO Method document in “Attachments”.

### 4. Keep It Simple!

ATS systems are not humans so sometimes they can’t read complex formatting. Here are some recommended formatting suggestions for creating ATS-friendly versions of your resume:

- List dates of your employment after the company name, instead of listing the dates first.
- Don’t use the header and footer feature of Microsoft Word, otherwise you will notice that they might wind up in the middle of a page when you paste your resume into an online application box, giving your resume a less-than-professional appearance.
- Be sure your name is the first thing on the document, followed by clear contact information.
- Use standard subject headings—you can use all CAPS to help them stand out.
- Use standard bullets instead of fancy symbols (since the ATS might not be able to read those).
- Don’t submit your cover letter as the first page of your resume—the ATS is looking for a resume.

### 5. Test Your Formatting

If you are not sure how your resume will look to an older ATS, try saving it in a Plain Text format (.TXT). If you are given the option, select the formatting with line breaks. See what it looks like. If the content is jumbled, you may want to re-think your strategy and simplify your formatting. If you are going to actually upload the resume to an online portal, consider saving it as a .DOC file in Word (as opposed to a .DOCX) or as a .PDF file. Often, the application site will indicate a preference.

### 6. Pick a Simple Font

Go with a simple, standard font. Fonts like Arial, Verdana, Calibri, Tahoma, and Times Roman are pretty easy to read. Don’t get too fancy with your font choice, because you want to be sure the ATS can read it. Also, try not to mix fonts or use too many effects, like italics or underlining, to be sure that the ATS can read the file.