

GUIDE TO APPLICANT TRACKING SYSTEMS

FIRST STEPS

- ✓ Find out what type of applicant tracking system (ATS) the company where you are applying is using; it can typically be found at the bottom of the application page.
- ✓ Determine what type of documents the applicant tracking system accepts (.doc, .pdf, etc.).
- ✓ Read the job description to determine keywords you need to highlight in your résumé.
- ✓ Create a new file for your ATS-formatted résumé; save it and keep the original résumé file.

WHAT IS AN APPLICANT TRACKING SYSTEM (ATS)?

Applicant Tracking Systems are software platforms that allow companies to manage their recruitment process electronically. Employers can post and manage job listings, and candidates can enter their personal information and upload documents, such as their resume, cover letter, and work samples.

How to tell if the company is using an ATS: Take a look at the website link on which the application appears; if you notice it says something like “companyname.taleo.net” or “companyname.isims.com”, then the organization is most likely using an ATS. Application processes vary widely from company to company, but it can be helpful to stay on the lookout for signs like this of an applicant tracking system.

Why it’s important to know how they work: Because applicant tracking systems are used to streamline the hiring process for companies, they operate by looking for very specific criteria, such as keywords. When you upload your résumé, if it fails to meet this criteria, it is likely your application will not be passed on to the company’s Human Resources department. Since, on average, 75% of applications get rejected by such systems, knowing how to tailor your résumé accordingly is important.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT FILE TYPE

Choose the format: Most applicant tracking systems can only read .doc or .docx formats, but once you know the system that you are using, do an online search to determine which file types are compatible with that system. Some will accept word documents and .pdf files, but not image files like .jpg or .png.


FORMATTING AND LANGUAGE

Use simple formatting: Put your résumé in an easy to read format that displays your experience in reverse chronological order.

No tables, text boxes, special characters or borders: These can confuse the applicant tracking system and may cause it to misread or simply not read what’s included in the table/box/special formatting. Use standard bullet points to avoid system rejection.

MU CAREER CENTER

Lower Level,
Student Success Center

 (573) 882-6801

 career.missouri.edu

 career@missouri.edu



Put the job title/position first: Most applicant tracking systems are set up to read job titles first, so make sure not to have dates or other information first when listing your work experience. When adding keywords, it is better to incorporate them into your position title rather than your job description as position titles tend to hold more weight. For example, having held the title Customer Service Manager is better than showing “customer service management” in the job description.

Use standard section headers: The ATS will typically be looking for standard headers such as “Education” and “Work Experience”, so try to stick to these. While it may be helpful to sort your work experience into categories on your résumé, the system may not recognize this.

Longer résumés may help: Uploading a longer résumé with all of the relevant experience and keywords you want to highlight could be beneficial. Use the extra space to elaborate on key experiences that may fit the criteria for which the ATS is looking; go for that multi-page résumé!

KEYWORDS ARE HELPFUL

Keywords are what allow the system to determine if you are a good match for the listed position. ATS rank words by their location, description, and repetition. Make sure to include relevant descriptions of experiences that include as many of those keywords as possible in your bullet points to highlight those skills. There are a few tricks to help you find those keywords:

Word Clouds: An easy way to help you think about what keywords a position may be looking for is to use a word cloud generator like wordle.com. Word clouds are visual representation of words that occur the most frequently in a block of text. You can copy and paste the job description in the word cloud generator, and the most frequent words will appear the largest. Use those keywords in your résumé, but careful not to “keyword stuff”. An ATS may flag your résumé if you use too many keywords.

LinkedIn: Using the *Advance Search* function on LinkedIn, look for connections and other professionals (searching for alumni of your institution is a great place to start!) in the industry you are interested or who have the job title for which you are applying. Review their profiles to find the skills they list most; many of those will be the keywords used as criteria by the ATS.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

When applying for a job through an applicant tracking system, finding tips from a variety of sources will be extremely beneficial. Staying up to date on the newest requirements of these systems will help increase the chances of your application reaching the hiring department. If you can, talk to a person at the company to get their insight into what might help get your application/resume through the system.

Online research: We recommend doing an online search for up-to-date tips about applicant tracking systems, as the ways in which they operate can change quickly (tip: look for some of the most recently posted articles). LinkedIn often publishes updated articles about applicant tracking systems – try starting your search there, and update your profile while you’re on the site while you’re at it!

NEXT STEPS

- ✓ Come to the MU Career Center to talk with a Career Specialist about your job search questions and next steps.
- ✓ Visit <https://career.missouri.edu> and click on the “Resources” Tab to visit [Mizzou Career Tools](#), where you can search our site for career guides, videos, links, infographics, and more!