

Mastering Applicant Tracking Systems



Applicant Tracking Systems, ATS, are the computer systems used by organizations to manage applications. The ATS will read your resume and then rank and score your qualifications as compared to the job description.

Make sure your resume is targeted. Follow the basic formatting tips to help increase your chances for an interview.

Top 5 Tips:

1. **Do not use templates!** Use a standard Word document, and save in .doc format. Not all ATS systems can read .docx, PDF, RTF, and JPG formats.
2. **Use simple formatting.** Use single column format. Do not use headers, footers, templates, symbols (bullet points are fine), textboxes, or shading.
3. **Customize each resume** for the specific position being sought using language from the job description. "One-size-fits-all" does not work with applicant tracking systems. Incorporate relevant, targeted keywords and phrases for the position being sought. Be specific -- i.e., "Adobe Photoshop" instead of "image-editing software."
4. **Use keywords and phrases in context.** Incorporate them into descriptive achievement-oriented bullet points; do not just include them as a list of skills or competencies.
5. **Edit carefully.** The Applicant Tracking System will not recognize misspelled words. If your resume passes the ATS screen it will be reviewed by human beings so it must be error-free!

Good To Go Formatting: Will not inhibit reading or scoring of content

1. Borders, shading and color text (disappear but do not impact reading/scoring)
2. Italics, bold and underlining (disappear but do not impact reading/scoring)
3. Symbols you can create on your keyboard (*|+=) will pass through the ATS and maintain their integrity
4. Dates placed beside the company/job title or out on the right margin
5. Graphics, including pictures, logos and graphs (disappear but do not impact reading/scoring)
6. San serif fonts (Arial, Times New Roman, Courier, Helvetica) are safest for ATS

Writer Beware Formatting: Likely to inhibit scoring of resume

1. Text boxes (nothing in them will be read in many systems)
2. PDF documents (not readable/scored in many systems)
3. Word templates (underlying code seen as spyware or virus)
4. Contact information should not be in the header. It should be in the body of the text.
5. Spaces between letters to "expand" text (ATS sees each letter as a separate word)
6. Don't list your credentials (MBA, CPA, certifications) next to your name. Use a separate line on the resume