

How to Write an ATS-Compliant Resume

The easiest way to ensure your resume will be accepted by an ATS (Applicant Tracking System) is to submit a resume that is both ATS-friendly and human-reader ready.

The two are not mutually exclusive; however, ATS-friendly resumes are formatted more carefully, while human-reader resumes may contain graphic elements that make the document easier to read and more attractive to the reader.

Because the ultimate goal is to have the resume reviewed by a human, even an ATS-friendly resume needs to be readable – and attractive – to human eyes.

Some Quick ATS Resume Considerations:

1. If you are given the choice to copy-and-paste the resume or upload a file during an application process, *choose the upload option*. This will ensure formatting is retained for the eventual human reader.
2. Some applicant tracking systems can manage graphics (or simply ignore them), but since some systems can't handle graphics ensure they don't interfere with content... or ensure you translate information from a graphic into the body of the file.
3. One way to ensure a match with a posted job is to "mirror" the job posting in your resume, never copying and pasting the complete job ad (this will be flagged and get your application removed), but working to incorporate job posting details naturally into your resume content.
4. The main body of the resume is critical – some ATS software cannot read header/footer information, so if you include contact information in those sections it may not be read. (And remember, geographic location can be used as a filter.)
5. Populate the file with appropriate keywords. Work experience sections should also include the skills used in the role (including computer software and hardware, if relevant).
6. One nice thing about applicant tracking systems is that they are not sensitive to the length of the resume, so two or more pages are fine. However, they may be sensitive to formatting issues (for example, don't condense text or use light colored font. These make it hard for the system to read).
7. Even if hiring managers aren't using a formal applicant tracking system, they often file documents on their hard drive. Use your name and targeted job title in the resume file (i.e: John Smith-Financial Accountant-Resume.docx) instead of the generic "Resume.docx"

So, does an ATS-friendly resume have to be basic and boring?

Not necessarily – although formatting has to be carefully considered.



Fast Formatting Tips:

- Use a Microsoft Office Word file in .docx format (preferred). Or re-save your Word file as a "Text Only" (.txt) file.
- List your contact information at the top of the document – never in the header or footer.
- Create section headings that are clear and common like "Summary," "Work Experience," and "Education." Make headers larger.
- Use simple bullets (•) or keyboard characters (*, -, or >).
- Ensure appropriate white space throughout the file.
- Put the targeted job title as the header of the resume. Make your intentions clear.
- List work history in reverse chronological order (this is easier for the system to read). List position information in the order of: company name, dates, position title, role requirements, and bulleted achievements.
- Match the language of the job posting as much as possible, authentically.
- Populate the file with relevant, repeated keywords and key phrases – with variations (ex: managed and managing).
- Add keywords to the file's metadata.
- Don't place resume details within tables. These details may not be read, or may be difficult for the system to read.

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