

The Ultimate Guide to Beating Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)

In today's competitive job market, optimizing your resume for Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) is essential. This guide will teach you everything you need to know to get your resume noticed by recruiters and increase your chances of landing more interviews.

1. What is an ATS?

An ATS is a software application used by employers to manage the hiring process. It collects, sorts, and ranks resumes based on certain criteria. This technology helps hiring managers quickly identify the most qualified candidates, saving time and money.

2. How Applicant Tracking Systems Work

There are four basic steps to how an ATS works:

1. **Job Requisition:** The ATS receives a job requisition that includes the job title, desired skills, and required experience.
2. **Resume Submission:** Applicants submit their resumes to the ATS.
3. **Resume Parsing:** The ATS parses, sorts, and ranks the resumes based on how well they match the job description.
4. **Filtering and Ranking:** Recruiters filter resumes by searching for key skills and job titles, often using complex search queries.

For example, if a recruiter searches for "Administrative Assistant AND data entry AND payroll," only resumes containing these terms will be highlighted.

3. ATS vs. CRM

- **ATS (Applicant Tracking Systems):** Used during the hiring process for resume parsing, candidate screening, and assessments.
- **CRM (Candidate Relationship Management):** Used to target potential candidates who haven't yet applied. CRM systems help build relationships through email marketing, scheduling, and communication tools.

4. Key Features of an ATS

- **Resume Parsing:** Extracts data from resumes such as contact information, work history, education, and skills.
- **Advanced Search:** Filters applications by keywords, job titles, skills, experience, and education.
- **Candidate Sourcing:** Actively searches for potential candidates using multiple channels.
- **Email Templates:** Ensures consistent and professional communication with candidates.
- **Advanced Analytics and Reporting:** Generates detailed reports on hiring trends and other data.
- **Interview Scheduling:** Automates the scheduling of interviews.

5. How Accurate is ATS Software?

While ATS can save time, they are not perfect. Many qualified candidates are overlooked because their resumes do not contain the right keywords. To increase your chances, make sure your resume contains the exact keywords that employers are searching for.

6. Who Uses ATS?

Over 97% of Fortune 500 companies use ATS, and the adoption rate is growing among smaller organizations as well. If you're applying to a large organization or through an online form, you are likely interacting with an ATS.

7. Why Employers Use ATS

Employers receive hundreds of resumes for each job opening. ATS software simplifies and speeds up the hiring process, making it easier for employers to manage large volumes of applications.

8. The Future of ATS

Artificial intelligence (AI) is making ATS more sophisticated. Future systems are expected to be fully integrated with social media platforms and use AI-powered chatbots for initial candidate interactions.

9. Optimizing Your Resume for ATS

Here are some tips to optimize your resume for ATS:

- **Tailor Your Resume:** Customize your resume for each job description.
- **Use Keywords:** Match your resume keywords to the job description.
- **Use Standard Formats:** Avoid complex formatting, headers, footers, and special characters.
- **File Type:** Submit your resume in PDF format or Word in some cases.
- **Use Simple Fonts:** Stick to traditional fonts like Helvetica, Garamond, or Georgia.
- **Avoid Graphics:** Keep your resume text-based.
- **Use Standard Headings:** Use headings like "Work Experience" and "Education."

10. Testing Your Resume for ATS Compatibility

Use a resume scanner like Jobscan to test your resume against job descriptions. Jobscan provides a score and highlights missing keywords, helping you optimize your resume for ATS.

11. Common ATS Resume Formatting Mistakes

Date Formats

Use MM/YYYY or "Month Year" formats consistently.

- ATS systems often parse dates to calculate the duration of your employment. Inconsistent date formats can lead to errors in parsing, which might cause your experience to be miscalculated or ignored.
- Examples:
 - Correct: Jun 2020 - Present or 06/2020 - Present
 - Incorrect: Jun. 2020 - Present, 2020/06 - Present

Work Experience	
Senior Event Coordinator <i>TED Conferences LLC Toronto</i>	Dec 2022 - Present
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Managed the consolidation of reports for all major events, ensuring accurate and timely delivery.• Managed and executed large-scale corporate events, showcasing strong Event Development skills throughout the planning process.• Utilized project management skills to oversee entire event lifecycle from concept to completion	

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Include both long-form and acronym versions of keywords.

- ATS like Taleo and Lever may not recognize acronyms if they're not spelled out. To ensure your skills are properly indexed, use both forms.
- Example:

- Correct: Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
- Incorrect: SEO

Work Experience

Senior Financial Analyst
Puma | Vancouver

Jan 2023 - Present

- Utilized [Enterprise Planning Systems \(ERP\)](#) to enhance data reporting and analysis, reducing errors by 20%.
- Managed and improved the efficiency of financial operations through expert [Accounting](#) knowledge and practices.
- Developed detailed financial forecasts and budgets based on complex [Finance Accounting](#) data analysis.

Fancy Graphics, Lines, Tables, and Colour

Avoid using complex graphics or non-standard bullet points.

- Lever and iCIMS can struggle with parsing resumes that include images, graphics, or non-standard characters, which can result in missing information.
- Stick to plain text and simple bullet points (• or -).
- **Lines:** Use horizontal lines sparingly to separate sections but avoid overly complex designs.
- **Tables:** Avoid tables as they might not be parsed correctly by ATS.
- **Color:** Use color minimally and ensure there is high contrast between text and background.

Headers and Footers and Margins

Avoid placing critical information in headers or footers.

- ATS systems typically do not read headers and footers. Important information such as contact details should be placed in the main body of the document.
- Place your name and contact details at the top of the document within the main content area.
- **Margins:** Use 1-inch margins on all sides. If space is an issue, margins can be reduced to 0.75 inches but ensure that the document is not overcrowded.

Unique Fonts

Stick to standard fonts to ensure readability.

- Use common fonts like Arial, Times New Roman, or Calibri to avoid parsing issues. Lever and Greenhouse show resumes exactly as submitted, so readability is crucial.
- Font size should be between 10-12 points for body text and slightly larger (14-16 points) for headings.

Non-Standard Headings

Use conventional section headings.

- Sections like “Work Experience,” “Education,” “Skills,” and “Certifications” are universally recognized by ATS. Custom headings might not be parsed correctly.
- Example:
 - Correct: Work Experience, Education, Skills

- Incorrect: Professional Journey, Learning Achievements, Core Competencies
- **Contact Information:** Include your full name, phone number, email address, and LinkedIn profile.
- **Summary or Objective:** A brief statement that highlights your career goals and key qualifications.
- **Work Experience:** List your work history in reverse chronological order, including job titles, company names, locations, and dates of employment.
- **Education:** Include degrees earned, institutions attended, and graduation dates.
- **Skills:** List relevant skills, focusing on those mentioned in the job description.
- **Certifications:** Include any relevant professional certifications.

<p>Core Skills</p> <p>Microsoft Excel, Financial Modeling and Analysis, Budgeting and Forecasting, Variance, Analysis, Agile, Computer Science, Powerpoint, SQL</p> <p>Education</p> <p>University of British Columbia Jan 2012 - Apr 2016 Bachelor of Commerce</p> <p>Certificates</p> <p>Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) Jan 2018 <i>Deloitte Canada</i></p>

File Types

Prioritize PDF formats.

- Different ATS systems prefer different file formats. While some can accept Word Docs (.docx), most can and prefer PDF documents. Ensure your PDF is not image-based.
- Always check the job application instructions for preferred file formats.

Proofreading

Proofread your resume multiple times and use tools like Grammarly or Hemingway Editor to catch errors.

- Errors can lead to ATS and human recruiters misinterpreting your qualifications. Tools like Grammarly can help catch grammatical errors, while Hemingway Editor can improve clarity.

Conclusion

By understanding how ATS works and optimizing your resume accordingly, you can greatly increase your chances of getting your resume seen by a human recruiter. Use tools like Jobscan to help you tailor your resume for each job application, ensuring you highlight the skills and experiences that match the job description.

Remember, a well-optimized resume can be the key to landing more interviews and ultimately securing your dream job.