

What Job Seekers Need to Know About ATS

To increase job search success, all job seekers need to know what ATS (Applicant Tracking System) is and how it works.

It is estimated that most major companies use these systems to screen incoming resumes. If you apply for a position online *it is likely you are applying through an ATS.*

ATS is challenging because it involves computerised algorithms of chosen keywords and phrases to help find the right match between a submitted resume and an open position. The problem is no two systems are alike and you never know exactly what the system is searching for or how it weighs content.

If your resume is not formatted the right way, with the right keywords and phrases, it could rank as a poor match in ATS – regardless of your qualifications. This is challenging for most job seekers (hence the reason online applications have such a low success rate).

Some advice to help optimise your resume for ATS application includes:

1. Use a version of the resume that is easy to read.

It is recommended you use a .docx format that is optimised for the system. ATS looks primarily at content, therefore there is a strong likelihood that any graphics will not be 'seen', so ensure you translate image/graphic/chart information into the body of the file. It is also best to use traditional headers in clearly defined sections (Work Experience, Education) so the system can locate key details. The length of the resume also does not matter in an ATS.

2. Populate your resume with keywords from the targeted job posting.

This means customising each application to address the reader's needs. However, don't just stuff your resume full of keywords – the system will be searching for keywords *used in proper context*. Good content is still very important. Remember, once the resume makes it through the system an actual person will read it and the employer will be searching for clear skill demonstration – proof of skill – not just fluff.



3. Always follow the instructions of each individual job site when applying for positions, and supply a version that is compatible with ATS: consider using a .txt resume or an ATS-optimised .docx file.

Almost all ATS systems can read .docx Word files and some systems can read PDFs. The optimized Word file is 'the best of both worlds' because it is both ATS-friendly and eye-friendly (once it makes it through the system an actual person will likely review it).

If provided with an option to upload a copy of your nicely formatted colour/graphic PDF resume, do so.

It will retain format and be more pleasing for the eventual human reader. Or, use your fancier resume file for distribution *in-person or via email*.

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