

Navigating Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)

Many employers, both large and small, utilize Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) to initially review resumes. These computerized systems scan resumes for specific keywords and assess candidates' skills and qualifications. Before a human recruiter even sees your resume, it's likely that an ATS will have reviewed it. Therefore, aligning the language of your resume with that of the job description is crucial to ensure that your relevant skills are highlighted and stand out to the ATS.

Formatting:

- Avoid images, charts, tables, and graphics -- these are difficult for ATS to read. This means you should avoid using templates with invisible tables.
- Do not use text boxes -- in many ATS, anything inside the text box will not be read
- doc or .docx are the safest options for resume submissions. Only submit a PDF of your resume if that is what is requested. PDFs are not compatible with all ATS software.
- Document must be readable: Use 1-inch margins; you can go down to .5 inches on all sides (no lower)
- Stick to left-aligning your text. Resist the urge to center or justify your text -- it will make it harder for ATS to read.
- Do not put important details in the header or footer, such as your name, phone number, or email address. Not all ATS is able to read the information in the header and footer sections of a Word document.
- Use simple bullet points (rather than intricate characters) to stay compatible with ATS.
- Keep your resume design simple and clean; this means black colored font and normal font (i.e., Arial, Georgia, Tahoma, Helvetica, Calibri, Gill Sans, Times New Roman, Veranda).
- Complex resumes confuse applicant tracking systems. Avoid underlining words; it can mess up the legibility of lower-case letters like "g".
- Use a readable font size -- 10 or 12 pt. is best.
- Customize each resume for the specific position you're applying for.

Keywords are critical to writing a tailored resume

Recruiters sift through ATS by keyword, typically searching for job titles or hard skills. Additionally, some ATS automatically score resumes based on how closely their content aligns with the job description.

- Pay close attention to what soft and hard skills appear in the job description multiple times and make sure you include them in your resume via action verbs (aka market, analyze, develop, communicate, manage). Copy and paste the job description into [EdWordle](#) or [Text Analyzer](#) to make this easier.

- Use critical keywords more than once
- Use spelling, numbers, and abbreviations correctly. Make sure you match the spelling of a word to how it is spelled in the job description. If the job description spells out numbers, write them out in your resume as well. Only abbreviate terms (i.e., B.S. degree) if it is also abbreviated in the job description.

Put Your Resume to the Test

[Resume Worded](#) is an online resume grader that uses an algorithm similar to an ATS to compare your resume to a job description. The website will give you a match rate based on skills, job title, and education. Visit Resume Worded, upload your resume and job description to put your resume to the test!

Additional Resources:

- [Beat the Robots: How to Get Your Resume Past the System and Into Human Hands](#)
- [How to Write an ATS Resume](#)