



What is an Application Tracking System (ATS) & How to Ensure Your Resume Passes

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An applicant tracking system (ATS) is a type of software used by HR departments to store job applicant resumes. This database serves as a convenient tool for recruiters and hiring managers by sorting and filtering data from resumes to effectively narrow candidate lists. Companies may receive hundreds of applications at once, so this automated process saves them time. They can also send customized acceptance and rejection emails through the ATS.

How Do They Operate?

ATS software typically asks applicants to answer a series of “knock out” questions designed to cut out applicants early in the application process. This may include short answer or multiple-choice questions that are flagged if applicants respond in certain ways. For instance, if you check “No” to a question about relocation, the system may flag your application, so recruiters know to dismiss it. This process may also result in an auto-rejection.

ATS software also enables hiring teams to view resumes based on the language you use, your location, if you’re a referral, and other filters. Moreover, the keywords you choose can result in a higher ranking within the system and allow recruiters to gather insight on your profile quickly.

How to Tailor Your Resume

Optimize your resume to match the job description. Carefully review the description and choose terms that stand out to you. This can include character traits, work experience, educational background, location, skills, or otherwise. Prioritize skills and work experience that reflects you’re a great fit. Your resume needs to include these keywords so the ATS and hiring team can easily find your resume and rank it higher within the system.

General Tips

1. Use a traditional or hybrid format. The standard resume format details your work experience in reverse chronological order so the hiring team can review your most recent position and then work down. The ATS tends to respond better to this format instead of layouts like the functional resume that emphasize top accomplishments. Hiring teams may also grow suspicious regarding work experience and won’t have the full context.

As a compromise, a hybrid format presents top skills and accomplishments as well work experiences in reverse chronological order.

2. Moreover, try to avoid using symbols, such as ampersands (&) in place of words. It's also best to leave out other graphics, such as bullet points, graphs, or tables, as the ATS may not be able to read them. If you do include bullet points or other symbols like accent marks, change the format to a PDF, so the file remains the same.

3. Choose a simple font type. Many ATS may not respond well to different design selections, such as placing words in italics or warping or highlighting the text in any way.

4. Opt for standard headings. Include traditional headings like "Work Experience" or "Professional Experience" rather than a more unique heading like "My Work" to avoid confusing the system and misplacing your information.

5. Avoid exclusively using long-form or acronym versions of keywords. Because some ATS may only filter certain keywords, it's best to include both versions of terms. For instance, include "Content Management System" as well as "CMS." Otherwise, your profile may not match the job description.

Final Note

Because ATS store resumes, hiring teams may reach out about multiple jobs if you're a great fit or for a future job with the same company.

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<https://www.jobscan.co/applicant-tracking-systems>

<https://www.hireright.com/blog/ats-integration/e-recruiting-integration/the-truth-about-applicant-tracking-systems-ats>