

Beating Applicant Tracking Systems

Optimizing Your Résumé

OFFICE OF CAREER EDUCATION
**BRIDGE FROM
COLLEGE**
to Career Success

Applicant tracking systems (ATS) are the computer systems used by **95%** of employers to manage the flood of applications received.

The ATS will read your résumé, and then **rank & score** your qualifications against the job description. Only applicants who receive high scores will get a call for an interview. If you follow these tips, you will increase the likelihood that your résumé will rise to the top of the list.



Top 5 Tips:

1. **Do not use templates!** Use a standard Word document, and save in **.doc** format: File/Save As/Word 97-2003, or as a **.pdf**. **Not all ATS systems can read .docx, PDF, RTF, and JPG formats.*
2. **Use simple formatting.** Do not use headers (including for contact information), footers, templates, borders, lines, symbols (bullet points are fine) or shading. **Do not use images** of any kind as it's likely to cause instant rejection of your application.
3. **Customize each résumé** for the specific position being sought using language from the job description. "One-size-fits-all" does not work with applicant tracking systems. Incorporate relevant, targeted **keywords** and phrases for the position being sought. Be specific -- i.e., "Adobe Photoshop" instead of "image-editing software")
4. **Use keywords and phrases in context.** Incorporate them into descriptive achievement-oriented bullet points; do not just include them as a list of skills or competencies.
5. **Edit carefully:** The ATS will not recognize misspelled words. If typos appear anywhere on your document, it's likely to instantly reject the application. And, if your résumé survives the ATS screen, it will next be reviewed by human beings so it must be error-free.

Make sure your optimized résumé also:

- Does **not** include any special characters or accented words – yes this includes **resume!**
- Includes **no** punctuation in your name, such as () , / -
- Is in a **single column** format (no tables, multiple columns, or text boxes)
- Uses simply formatted text of a reasonable size (**11 point font or above**)
- Contains **only your name** on the top line, with no degrees or certifications after it
- Includes standard fonts (Arial, Georgia, Tahoma, Calibri, and Verdana are safe choices)
- Includes months when listing dates (e.g., 06/2010 – 08/2012). **Dates should be on the right**
- Does not contain complex formatting (condensed or expanded text) -- that is, don't use extra spaces between letters, because the ATS can't "read" it
- Contains proper capitalization and punctuation. Both of these can affect how information is parsed and assigned within the ATS database
- Uses the full, spelled-out version terms in addition to abbreviations and **acronyms** [i.e., *Certified Public Accountant (CPA)*]

DO

- **Do** remember that even if you have a personal connection through your network, your résumé will typically need to be submitted to the company's ATS.
- When applying for a specific position, **do** use that **exact job title** in your materials.
- When listing dates for employment or education, **do** list dates to the **right** of the information.
- If you wish to include a context statement describing the organization you worked with, **do** include that statement after the organization name, your title, and employment dates.
- **Do** consider including **section headers in ALL CAPS** to make it easy for the applicant tracking system to categorize the information.
- **Do** save a fresh version of your resume if you submit it as a .pdf. PDFs can become **corrupted** the more frequently the original document is opened. A best practice is to **save a fresh PDF** (converted from a Word .doc) before your upload it to every job application.
- If you are working towards a certification that is a requirement for the position, **do** include it on the résumé -- but make sure you include a phrase such as "**Pursuing** (name of credential)"
- **Do** check your email after applying for a position online. Some applicant tracking systems acknowledge submissions, but these automated responses may be diverted to your spam folder.
- If given the choice, **do** upload your résumé rather than cutting pasting sections into text boxes. When it is eventually forwarded to a human, it will look much more attractive.
- **Do** be mindful of special characters and accents you use on your résumé. Some words and phrases can be misinterpreted by an applicant tracking system -- for example, accented words. The word "résumé" itself is not ATS-friendly. The ATS does not recognize the accented letters. Instead, it reads it as "r?sum?"
- **Do** feel free to make your résumé as long as you want to. The ATS won't penalize you for length. However, since it may also be read by a person, keeping it to two pages is smart. However, if you have a 2-page résumé, **put your name and Page 2 in a header** so the ATS can't "see" it.

DON'T

- **Don't** list your credentials (MBA, CPA, etc.) *next to your name*. Include that information on a separate line.
- **Don't** include skills you don't possess on the résumé as an attempt to "trick" the applicant tracking system into selecting you. Anything on your résumé needs to be substantiated in an interview, or increasingly in a skills-based test before you interview.
- **Don't** mix different fonts and sizes in your résumé.
- **Don't** feel the need to create a completely stripped down document. In the olden days we would save documents in .txt format with absolutely no formatting before submitting online. Because your résumé will eventually be seen by a human being, keeping some simple formatting such as bold, caps and bullet points will help to keep your résumé attractive.
- **Don't** use the word "**in**" between your degree type and your major – i.e. "*Bachelor of Science in Accounting*" will confuse the ATS and it won't recognize the degree and major on the same line. **Instead**, use "*Bachelor of Science, Accounting*" or place the major underneath on a separate line.