



Ready Reference E-16
ATS-Applicant Tracking System
Helping Technology Help You

What is the ATS?

With the rise of web-based job applications in the mid-1990s, companies worldwide began using Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) to manage the entire recruitment process—reviewing resumes and job applications, screening and testing potential candidates, scheduling interviews, sending follow-up emails, etc. ATS are also used for regulatory compliance through their data collection and reporting capabilities.

What do I put on an ATS-Optimized Resume?

Because ATS searches all submitted resumes for keywords and bases the job applicant on the number of matched keywords, it is essential to think of and include all possible keywords pertaining to the job in your resume, including:

- Job postings
- Company websites and Facebook pages
- Online searches for specific industries and/or professions
- Online business, corporation, and industry directories
- O*Net Occupational Directory: www.onetonline.org
- O*Net Autocoder Matching Tool:
www.onetsocautocoder.com/plus/onetmatch
- Bureau of Labor Statistics: www.bls.gov

When you have a list of keywords to include, make sure that you incorporate them throughout your entire resume, with as many of the keywords as reasonably possible.

How do I format an ATS-Optimized Resume?

While some ATS are robust and highly advanced, others are simple and do not handle special formatting well—this could mean that content on your resume is skipped entirely! Follow these guidelines to ensure that all of your resume content is scanned.

Option 1: Create a .txt File:

- “Save as” and choose “Plain Text” (.txt).
- Rename the file and close
- Review the file to make sure there are no glitches or odd translations of special characters.

Option 2: Create a .doc or .docx file with plain formatting:

- Copy the entire contents of the original Word resume
- Open a new Word file
- Choose "Paste Special from the edit menu
- Select "Unformatted Text"
- Review carefully and edit as necessary to remove odd spacing, non-standard characters, and other glitches.
- Save the file as a .doc or .docx file

Option 3: Design a Resume for the "Human Eye":

As an alternative, you can format your "master resume" in a way that will not cause problems with most ATS. Follow these guidelines on your main resume to ensure that your resume is ATS-friendly.

- Fonts – No specific fonts required. Use standard fonts for a professional appearance.
- Font Size – Use a reasonable size (10, 11, 12)
- Symbols – Use asterisks, dashes, and only symbols found on your keyboard
- Accent Marks – Do not use
- Border and Lines – Fine to use if they are not touching any text. If in doubt, leave them out.
- Headers and Footers – Do not use for any important information.
- Graphics, Logos, Charts, Graphs – Do not use
- Bullets – Fine to use but avoid fancy shapes. Make sure bullet is not touching any text.
- Bold and Caps – Fine to use
- Italics and Underlines – Do not use
- Tables and Columns – Do not use. Keep everything in a single column, top to bottom

Follow these content and organizational guidelines to ensure that the ATS correctly detects your resume content:

- Name – List name and name only on first line of document
- Contact Information – Include only one mailing address, phone number, and email address
- Abbreviations and Acronyms – Spell out the first time, shown in parentheses, then use acronym
- Sections and Headings – Essential to use common headings outlined in Ready References E3
- Employment Experiences – Follow guidelines in Ready Reference E3