

FORMATTING RESUMES FOR ONLINE APPLICATIONS (APPLICANT TRACKING SYSTEMS)

Adapted from "The Easy How-To Guide to Formatting Resumes for Applicant Tracking Systems" by [Lisa Rangel](#), Executive Resume Writer, Chameleon Resumes LLC

What is an Applicant Tracking System (ATS)?

An applicant tracking system (ATS) is software that works like a resume database to help companies streamline their hiring process and review applications more quickly. They organize and sort applications, and can also be programmed to screen candidates based on the content you include in your resume. Submitted applications are stored in a database and recruiters can search submissions using keywords and phrases to identify candidates to advance through the hiring process. Many ATS's score applications based on parameters of the open position. Applicants are then ranked and sorted based on their score. **It is important to note that not all ATS's are alike.** Some scan key words, while others may not. Some systems can handle small graphics, while others can't. Some prefer pdfs while others require Word files; the system should tell you the format it prefers.

Step 1: Answer filter/pre-screening questions completely and properly

- Make sure to answer all the questions on the application. When a question is left blank, the ATS may discard your resume.

Step 2: Format your resume in an ATS-friendly manner

- Stick to common resume headings like Summary, Work Experience, Education and Skills.
- Remove images, columns, tables, fields, text boxes and graphics so the ATS can quickly scan your text for keywords and phrases. Avoid templates, which are a combination of fields and tables. The ATS may not be able to read data placed in images, tables, and text boxes, so avoid them.
- Remove special characters and avoid fancy bullets that are often illegible to an ATS scanner.
- Avoid special fonts and colors. Stick to easy to read fonts (Arial, Georgia) and use black color. Avoid underlining words which may hinder legibility of lower case letters such a g, j or y.
- Avoid spelling errors, since it doesn't know what you 'meant' to write. Don't use slang...ever.
- Include your contact information in the body of your resume, not in the header or footer.
- Save your resume as a basic word doc (.doc) or .txt file.
- Avoid page numbers.
- When writing your employment history, present the information for each employer in the same order, i.e., company name, title, city, state, and date, and in reverse chronological order (most recent first).

Step 3: Focus on your resume's content

- Beef up your skills section
 - Include any certifications you've received and mention any industry-specific terminology (ie. Salesforce for sales professionals or Oncology for healthcare professionals). Include both the spelled-out version and abbreviations of the same word. Include ALL of your skills that are WORK relevant.
- Customize your resume
 - Optimize your professional summary with bulleted achievements and skills that relate to the job description. Then, find a natural way to include those keywords and phrases in your summary and throughout your resume.
 - You can also optimize your headers and titles based on the job description. Let's say you see the term "communication skills" sprinkled throughout the job description. In your resume, make sure you mention your "communication skills" as an exact phrase.
- Don't overuse keywords
 - Do you need keywords? Absolutely. Should you stuff keywords throughout your resume? No. Do some research on what keywords are relevant to you.