

APPLICANT TRACKING SYSTEMS

WHAT IS AN APPLICANT TRACKING SYSTEM?

An Applicant Tracking System (ATS) is a type of software that companies use in the hiring process to filter out candidates using keywords. Most mid- and large-sized companies receive hundreds if not thousands of resumés, and ATS help manage the recruitment process, by making it easy to sort and organize resumés and applications, by searching for keywords. Approximately, 70% of resumés get rejected by ATS. Although this is helpful for employers, it can pose a challenge to job seekers. Understanding how an ATS works, and following these guidelines, may improve your chances of having your resumé successfully pass the ATS standards.

The best way to conquer the ATS, is to not rely on it at all. Instead, continue networking, and building connections with professionals in your field. Most jobs go unadvertised, so building and maintaining your network, can help you tap into the hidden job market, increasing the likelihood of securing more interviews.

Some guidelines for when applying through an ATS:

- **Stick to a standard format of resumé which includes dates** - the ATS ranks experience by the length of time you have held a position, therefore including dates will give a more accurate reading of your experience, e.g., Jan 2020 – June 2020.
- **Tailor your resumé to the job description** - the ATS scans resumés against the job description; the more of a match there is, the more likely it is that your resumé will get past the ATS.
- **Create a “Core Competencies” or “Skills” section to highlight the keywords related to your job target** - using keywords from the job description that represent both your soft and hard skills will help your resumé be ranked higher by the ATS.
- **Spell out your titles, degrees, and certifications** - the ATS only reads professional, recognizable words, and may not associate acronyms with their meanings, e.g., it is unlikely to know that ‘YU’ means York University.
- **Keep the format simple** - use basic headings, simple bullet points, and basic fonts such as Arial, Calibri, or Verdana. The ATS may have difficulty reading non-standard formatting.

Some things to avoid when applying through an ATS:

- **Overusing keywords** - Your resumé will eventually be read by human eyes; therefore, it is important to keep the content written in a way that makes sense and flows well. Overusing

keywords may detract from the quality of your resumé once it gets to the employer, and may reduce your chances of getting an interview.

- **Use of white text** - Some job seekers type key words in white text that are not visible to the human eye. Employers may have ways of checking for this, and this may count against you. Using white text may help land your resumé in front of an employer, but if they cannot see that you have the skills to do the job, chances are very low that you will be contacted.
- **Headers, footers, charts, images, or tables** - The ATS cannot parse out information from complicated formatting such as images, charts, or tables. Additionally, information put into headers or footers may be lost when scanned by the ATS.
- **Intricate fonts and fancy bullet points** - Some ATS have difficulty reading serif fonts, including Times New Roman, or non-standard formatting such as fancy bullet points.
- **Slang, spelling, or grammatical errors** - Since the ATS sorts resúmes by specific keywords, incorrect spelling may cause it to miss important information on your resumé. Also, when human eyes view your resumé, these mistakes will show poor attention to detail.