How to Create an ATS Resume (Step-By-Step)

Now that you know how the ATS works, we'll teach you how to beat it.

Just follow the steps we've outlined:
#1. Pick the Right Resume Format

First, you should pick a resume format before you start filling in your ATS resume.

There are three different resume formats to choose from:

Chronological (also called reverse-chronological)
Functional (also called skill-based)
Combination (a combination of the two above)

In most cases, we recommend sticking to the reverse-chronological resume format for your ATS resume.

This is the most popular format worldwide, so it's what hiring managers expect to see and what the ATS will probably expect.

The reverse-chronological format highlights your most recent work experience and achievements first. So, it's perfect for emphasizing your strengths in front of the ATS and human hiring managers down the line.

#2. Adjust the Layout

Once your resume's format is out of the way, it's time to figure out the layout.

This part can affect how the ATS scans your resume and what the hiring manager thinks about it.

If your resume isn't formatted well, the ATS might have trouble scanning it. Not to mention, this part is important for human HRs, too. You want your resume to make a great first impression, and not look like a messy, cluttered document the hiring manager will skip in a heartbeat.

Here are some resume layout tips to help your ATS resume:

Fix the margins. Set the page margins to one inch on all sides. Any more than that, your resume will look too cluttered, while any less might make it look stretched out.
Set the line spacing. The standard line spacing is 1.0 between text and 1.15 between double lines and after subheadings, so adjust it accordingly on your resume.
Choose a professional font. There are plenty of resume fonts to choose from but you want to ensure your resume is easy to read by the ATS and hiring manager. We recommend choosing something professional but not overused, like Lora or Roboto.
Adjust the font size. Keep your headings at about 14 to 16 pt, and make sure your text is between 10 and 12 pt.

Use bullet points. Both the ATS and human hiring managers prefer bullet points to bulky paragraphs. This makes finding the keywords and phrases they're looking for in candidates easier.

Avoid graphics. Most ATS can't scan graphics, so any logos, charts, or pictures aren't going to register right. Keep your resume simple by avoiding them and focusing on text instead. Novorésumé's templates are exported as text-based PDF files, meaning all your content will be parsed by ATS.

#3. Label Your Sections Correctly

Remember to use the right titles for your resume sections when creating an ATS resume.

This might seem like a detail, but it can alter how the ATS reads and categorizes your information.

If you stick to standard, clear section headings like "Work Experience," "Skills," and "Education," you're all set.

But if you get creative with names like "Professional Journey" or "Academic Journey," you're in for an automatic rejection.

These section titles might sound interesting but they will likely confuse the ATS. Keep in mind that ATS is programmed to look for specific section titles. It will know where to pull information from your resume only when it finds them.

So, if you use non-standard headings, the ATS might misclassify your information or even skip over important details.

Not to mention that the human hiring managers will appreciate it, too. Labeling your resume sections clearly makes it easier for employers to find what they're looking for and increases your odds of getting an interview.

#4. Tailor Your Resume with Keywords

The most crucial step to getting your resume past the ATS and into the hands of a hiring manager is to learn how to use keywords effectively.

ATS software scans your resume for specific words and phrases related to the job you're applying for, and it's looking for a match between your skills and experiences and the job requirements.

So, if your resume doesn't contain the right keywords, the ATS will filter it out before a human sees it.

Here's how to effectively use keywords in your ATS resume:

Carefully read the job description and find any skills, action verbs, and other requirements.

Incorporate these keywords naturally throughout your resume.
Don't stuff the keywords everywhere - your resume should still flow naturally.

While keywords make or break your ATS score, in the end, a human will judge your resume. You need to strike a balance between optimizing for the ATS and creating a compelling narrative of why you're the right person for the job.

Resume summary or objective. This brief paragraph goes on top of your resume and lets the hiring manager know what you offer at a glance. Include a few crucial skills or qualifications that match the job description here. (E.g.: Digital marketer with 5+ years of experience. Looking to help Company XYZ with their social media management.)

Work experience. Try to mirror the language of the job ad when describing your roles and achievements. You can also use industry-specific terms relevant to the position. (E.g.: Spearheaded a successful social media marketing campaign that boosted engagement by 23% over three weeks.)

Skills section. Make sure you list both hard and soft skills that match the job requirements. (E.g.: social media marketing, Facebook advertising, budget management)

Education. This should be short and sweet since the ATS mostly looks for your degree and major. (E.g.: BA in Business Administration) However, if you're a recent graduate, you can include some relevant coursework, projects, or thesis topics that align with the job requirements.

#5. Stick to One Page

When it comes to resume length, one page is the golden rule.

On one hand, industry studies have shown that longer resumes tend to perform better with ATS compared to shorter ones. This is because they reach keyword density faster, so that might give them a potential edge in the initial screening process.

But on the other hand, your resume needs to be appealing to human eyes, too.

Once your resume passes the ATS, a hiring manager will review it. And let's face it, most hiring managers are pressed for time and prefer concise, easy-to-skim resumes that follow the ten-second resume rule.

So, a well-tailored one-page resume is your best bet. It forces you to be selective, highlighting only your most relevant and impressive qualifications, and ensures that every word counts for the ATS.

#7. Include a Cover Letter

The final secret step that can give you an edge against the ATS is to always include a cover letter with your resume.

Even if the job ad doesn't explicitly require a cover letter, you should still send one. Writing a cover letter shows the hiring manager that you're willing to go the extra mile for the job, which can set you apart from candidates who only submit the bare minimum.

Not to mention that a well-crafted cover letter can significantly boost your ATS score. Like your resume, the cover letter can be optimized with relevant keywords and phrases from the job description, which the ATS picks up on.

Writing a cover letter also lets you elaborate on experiences or qualifications you didn't have the space to explain on your resume. It's the perfect place to highlight impressive achievements that are particularly relevant to the role or express your knowledge of the company or passion for the industry.

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