

# How to Beat the Applicant Tracking System (ATS)

Companies use resume scanners, also known as ATS, to speed up their hiring and automatically filter out resumes that don't look like a good match for the job. Over 90% of resumes are discarded before they reach a hiring manager or a recruiter

☆ The goal of an ATS is to understand if you're a good fit for a job. It will try to determine your most recent work experience and your hard skills (e.g. software, languages, programming languages) from your resume.

☆ Almost every company uses some kind of resume screening software or applicant tracking system. If you're applying for a job online, you can be pretty confident your resume will go through an ATS.

## Readability

An ATS scans your past experience and skills to determine whether you're a good fit. If it can't correctly read your resume and its content, it will discard it as not having the right skills. That's why it's crucial to get your resume's readability in shape.

**Ensure your resume is readable by a [resume scanner](#).**

1- Use a standard template generated using Word or Google Docs

Use a single-column layouts (i.e. no two or more column templates), where information is not displayed side-by-side.

☆ Modern ATS are getting better at scanning multi-column layout but there are several ATS that fail at reading multi-column resumes in the way you'd expect it to - e.g. if your education and work experience were side-by-side, ATS might interpret your work experience as part of your education, or might not correctly interpret your recent work experience.

☆ There's a common misconception jobseekers have that to make their resume stand out, they need to use a fancy or creative template. Though, if you speak to experienced hiring managers and/or recruiters, they'll tell you that creative / fancy resumes are not only harder for ATS to read, but also harder for them to read too! Unless you're applying for a very creative role that requires a portfolio (and even then, not always!), you'll want to make sure you use a standard template that follows the guidelines

**Ensure your text is highlightable**

Typically, you should always submit your resume in PDF format to ensure your layout stays consistent and fonts don't get misrepresented. When you open your resume in PDF format, ensure your text is selectable / highlightable in Adobe Acrobat or Preview

☆ Always make sure your PDF was generated in either Word or Google Docs. This will ensure your text is highlightable.

☆ Refrain from creating your resume in Photoshop or online resume builders. While you can download/export the PDF from these tools, the text appears as an image and is often not highlightable / selectable as above

## **Use standard fonts**

Some newer fonts convert letters to special characters which often get scanned incorrectly by ATS. Stick to a standard font (Garamond, Arial, Calibri).

## **No images, pictures or diagrams**

Applicant Tracking Systems do not process images so you won't to avoid including them. Also avoid using diagrams, pie charts and graphs too!

☆ Similarly, avoid creating your resume in Photoshop or graphic design software - tools like this convert text into images, making them unreadable by ATS.

## **No tables**

Tables rarely get parsed correctly so avoid using them. Use tabs and right/left aligns to structure your resume instead.

## **Use standard section titles**

Label your work experience and education sections with conventional section titles. For example, use "Experience" instead of "My career in a nutshell". ATS look out for core sections and you want to make sure they're easy to find.

☆ Don't use fancy fonts or icons in your section titles. This could result in your sections not being identified correctly.

☆ An ATS needs to identify your work experience to judge if you're a good fit, so especially make sure your work experience is labelled correctly.

☆ Use reverse chronological order when describing your work experiences.

## Keyword Relevancy

### Compare your resume to the job description using a [job description keyword finder](#)

To evaluate if your resume is a good fit for the job, the ATS will check if your resume contains the key skills that the job requires.

☆ Save the job description on your computer when you apply for a job. The employer might remove it by the time your interview is scheduled.

### Add keywords but use them in the right context and don't overuse them

You don't want to just be keyword 'stuffing' your resume with every skill / keyword you can think of - while this may get you past an Applicant Tracking System initial filter, it'll not work in your favor when you get to a recruiter or hiring manager.

From their perspective, they'll immediately notice the keyword stuffing, which not only works against you, but also ruins your resume's readability and brevity (recruiters want to know you can synthesize important info on your resume). Instead, you want to identify the most critical skills (i.e. 'high value keywords') and the ones your employer are most likely going to be searching for, and make sure you've included those.

☆ Remember your resume will need to be read by a recruiter eventually. Use the right keywords in the right context, and don't compromise your resume's readability.

### Use the exact same spelling where possible

When including keywords on your resume, try to always use the same spelling / format as mentioned in the job description. For example, if an abbreviated form of the keyword is mentioned in the job description, include that in your resume.

☆ It's important to mention that while you add in keywords, don't just add in variations (of keywords, tenses) where they don't make sense. Grammar is so important when your resume eventually reaches a recruiter / hiring manager, so you want to make sure your resume is grammatically correct.

☆ Specifically for acronyms, you want to be using the full forms as well as the abbreviated forms.

### Do not add buzzwords and soft skills into your resume

You've probably seen job descriptions mention a ton of soft skills or buzzwords, such as "motivated", "hard-working" or "leadership skills".

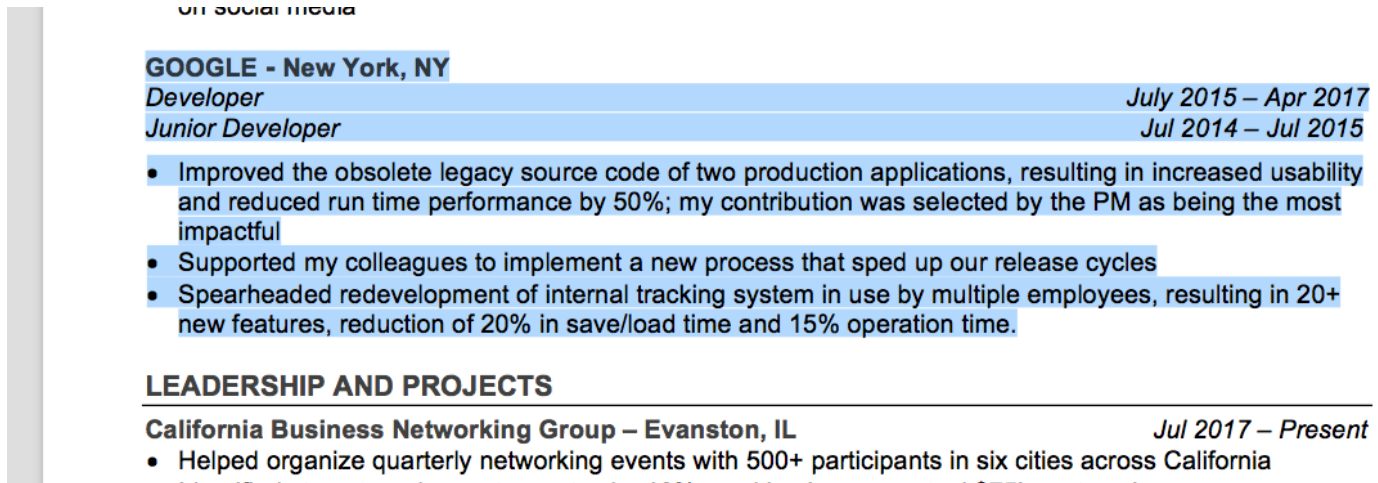
Do not include these words directly on your resume - they are often seen as fluffy and mean little without evidence. Instead, try to convey the following skills through your achievements.

☆ For example, don't just say you are a 'team player' or 'strong leader'. Instead, give a specific example of professional achievements you've made in a team or as a leader. "Delivered XYZ project as project manager in a cross-functional team of 10 people..." gives recruiters a much better indication of the size of teams you've worked in as well as the role you had.

# PDF or DOC format?

You should always use PDF since this ensures your layout will be consistent for all viewers unless the Word document is explicitly asked for.

However, *always make sure your PDF was generated in either Word or Google Docs*. Once you create/export your PDF via Word/Google Docs, you'll notice that the text is selectable / highlightable in Adobe Acrobat or Preview. See the screenshot below:



The PDF's text is highlightable. If you've created your resume in Word or Google Docs and export it this way, it will be read correctly by ATS.

Refrain from creating your resume in Photoshop or online resume builders. While you can download/export the PDF from these tools, the text appears as an image and is often not highlightable / selectable as above.

## Why you should stick to PDF

- Preserved layout: Word documents and their layouts appear differently on different versions of Word or operating systems. For example, your resume that looks one page on your computer may look like 2 pages on another computer. You want to make sure your resume appears correctly on all machines.
- Many Applicant Tracking Systems cannot read Word documents correctly. Some software don't accept Word altogether, while many incorrectly process Word files and don't read the fonts correctly if they aren't common fonts.
- A PDF cannot be edited easily like a Word document. Leaving your resume in Word exposes you to the possibility that someone might inadvertently (or intentionally) alter it.
- If you are using a font an employer does not have installed and you send a Word file, your resume won't appear correctly - instead, it would appear as special (unreadable, think Wingdings) characters on their computers.
- Finally, not everyone has Office installed - for example, a recruiter or hiring manager could be using a computer that hasn't been completely configured yet. If they don't have Office, they're not going to be able to read your resume. On the other hand, PDFs can be opened directly via email or the browser making them viewable on every platform.