10 ATS Mistakes Costing You Interviews

A Free Guide from All Resume Services

Introduction

In today's competitive job market, over **75% of resumes never reach human eyes**. Why? Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) filter out candidates before recruiters even see their applications. Understanding how ATS works—and avoiding common mistakes—can be the difference between landing an interview and being automatically rejected.

This checklist reveals the **10 most common ATS mistakes** we've identified after writing over **5,000 professional resumes** and achieving a **96% interview success rate** for our clients.

Mistake #1: Using Tables, Text Boxes, or Graphics for Key Information

The Problem: ATS software cannot read information stored in tables, text boxes, headers, footers, or graphic elements. When you place your contact details, work experience, or skills in these formats, the ATS sees blank space.

The Fix:

- Use simple, clean formatting with standard headings
- Place all critical information in the main body text
- Avoid fancy design elements, columns, or creative layouts
- Stick to standard fonts (Arial, Calibri, Times New Roman)

Real Example: A client's resume had their contact information in a header table. The ATS couldn't extract it, so they appeared as "no contact information" to recruiters. After reformatting, they received 3 interview requests within one week.

Mistake #2: Inconsistent or Non-Standard Section Headings

The Problem: ATS systems look for specific section headings to categorize your information. Creative headings like "My Journey" or "What I've Accomplished" confuse the software.

The Fix:

- Use standard headings: **Professional Experience**, **Work History**, **Education**, **Skills**, **Certifications**

- Be consistent throughout your resume

- Avoid creative or vague section titles

- Use bold formatting for headings, not underlines or italics

Quick Check: Does your resume use industry-standard headings that clearly identify each section?

Mistake #3: Keyword Stuffing or Missing Keywords Entirely

The Problem: ATS ranks resumes based on keyword matches with the job description. Too few keywords = low ranking. Too many (stuffing) = flagged as spam. Both approaches fail.

The Fix:

- Carefully read the job description and identify 10-15 key skills, qualifications, and requirements

- Naturally incorporate these keywords throughout your resume (especially in your summary and experience sections)

- Use both acronyms and full terms (e.g., "ATS" and "Applicant Tracking System")

- Mirror the exact phrasing from the job posting when possible

Pro Tip: If the job description mentions "project management" five times, make sure your resume includes this phrase multiple times in context.

Mistake #4: Submitting Your Resume in the Wrong File Format

The Problem: Not all file formats are ATS-friendly. PDFs can sometimes cause parsing errors, while image files (.jpg, .png) are completely unreadable by ATS.

The Fix:

- **Best choice:** .docx (Microsoft Word format)
- **Safe alternative:** .pdf (but only if the job posting specifically accepts PDFs)
- **Never use:** .jpg, .png, .pages, or other non-standard formats
- Follow the application instructions exactly—if they ask for .docx, don't send .pdf

Important: Always check the job posting for specific file format requirements.

Mistake #5: Using Uncommon or Fancy Fonts

The Problem: ATS struggles to read decorative, script, or unusual fonts. Even some common fonts can cause parsing issues.

The Fix:

- **Safe fonts:** Arial, Calibri, Georgia, Times New Roman, Helvetica, Cambria
- **Avoid:** Papyrus, Comic Sans, script fonts, decorative fonts
- Use font size 10-12pt for body text
- Use font size 14-16pt for your name only

Test: If your font looks artistic or creative, it's probably not ATS-friendly.

Mistake #6: Including Irrelevant Information or Outdated Experience

The Problem: ATS scans for relevance. Including outdated skills (e.g., "Windows 95"), irrelevant hobbies, or experience from 20+ years ago dilutes your keyword density and confuses the ranking algorithm.

The Fix:

- Focus on the last 10-15 years of relevant experience

- Remove outdated technical skills

- Eliminate personal information (age, marital status, photo)

- Only include hobbies if they're directly relevant to the role

Rule of Thumb: Every line on your resume should answer the question: "How does this make me a better candidate for THIS specific job?"

Mistake #7: Using Abbreviations Without Spelling Them Out

The Problem: ATS may not recognize abbreviations, especially industry-specific ones. If the job description uses the full term and your resume only has the abbreviation, you won't get credit for that keyword.

The Fix:

- Spell out abbreviations on first use, then include the abbreviation in parentheses

- Example: "Certified Public Accountant (CPA)" instead of just "CPA"

- Use both versions throughout your resume when space allows

- This applies to degrees, certifications, software, and industry terms

Example: "Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Computer Science" is better than "BSc Computer Science"

Mistake #8: Ignoring Job-Specific Skills and Requirements

The Problem: Generic resumes that don't address the specific requirements of the job posting rank poorly in ATS. The system is looking for exact matches to the job description.

The Fix:

- Customize your resume for each application
- Create a "Core Competencies" or "Key Skills" section near the top
- Match your skills section to the job requirements
- Use the same terminology as the job posting

Time-Saving Tip: Create a master resume with all your skills and experience, then customize a tailored version for each application by emphasizing relevant keywords.

Mistake #9: Poor Grammar, Spelling Errors, and Typos

The Problem: While ATS primarily scans for keywords, many systems also flag resumes with excessive errors. More importantly, if your resume does pass ATS, these mistakes will immediately disqualify you with human recruiters.

The Fix:

- Use spell-check, but don't rely on it alone
- Read your resume out loud to catch awkward phrasing
- Have someone else proofread it
- Pay special attention to company names, job titles, and technical terms

Common Mistakes to Watch For:

- Their/there/they're
- Your/you're
- Affect/effect

- Inconsistent tense (mixing past and present tense in the same role)

Mistake #10: Failing to Quantify Achievements

The Problem: ATS looks for measurable results and concrete achievements. Vague statements like "responsible for sales" don't rank as well as specific, quantified accomplishments.

The Fix:

- Use numbers, percentages, dollar amounts, and timeframes
- Replace "Managed a team" with "Managed a team of 12 employees"
- Replace "Increased sales" with "Increased sales by 35% over 6 months"
- Replace "Improved efficiency" with "Reduced processing time by 40%, saving $50K annually"

Formula: Action Verb + Task + Measurable Result

Examples:

- ❌ "Handled customer complaints"
- ✅ "Resolved 95% of customer complaints within 24 hours, improving satisfaction scores by 28%"

Your ATS-Friendly Resume Checklist

Use this quick checklist before submitting your next application:

☐ **Format:** Simple, clean layout with no tables, text boxes, or graphics
☐ **Headings:** Standard section headings (Professional Experience, Education, Skills)
☐ **Keywords:** Job-specific keywords naturally incorporated throughout
☐ **File Type:** .docx format (unless otherwise specified)
☐ **Font:** Standard, ATS-friendly font (Arial, Calibri, etc.)
☐ **Relevance:** Only recent, relevant experience included
☐ **Abbreviations:** Spelled out on first use with abbreviation in parentheses
☐ **Customization:** Resume tailored to match specific job requirements

☐ **Proofreading:** No spelling or grammar errors
☐ **Quantification:** Achievements include specific numbers and results

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Ready to Transform Your Resume?

At **All Resume Services**, we've helped over **5,000 Australians** land interviews and secure their dream jobs with professionally written, ATS-optimized resumes.

Our Guarantee:

- ✅ 96% interview success rate
- ✅ ATS-optimized formatting
- ✅ Tailored to your industry and career goals
- ✅ 2-3 day turnaround (1-day express available)
- ✅ Unlimited revisions until you're satisfied

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Our team understands local recruitment practices and tailors each document to meet Australian standards, ensuring your application resonates with local employers and passes ATS screening.