



## Resume, Meet the Computer: Top Formatting Tips for ATS

Considering how many employers have turned to Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) to manage online applications, it has become essential to consider how our resumes get “read” by these systems.

Our resume is a marketing document - it highlights our skills, experience, accomplishments and **VALUE** to a particular employer. They are “targeted” to the employer’s needs and therefore often changes per job description. Presentation of this value matters a lot...first impressions are formed within the first few seconds of viewing a resume. And so we want to present our most convincing proof that are worth interviewing and therefore cannot afford to have an ATS *misread* our information.

So what to do?

We *could* convert our resume to a [“plain text”](#) document which would essentially eliminate all of its unique formatting and basically transform the content into universal language (ASCII). This process can help mitigate the tower of babel effect and ensure the ATS will scan correctly, but the trade-off is a rather bland document devoid of any character or personality.

**Barring this conversion to a plain-text resume, here is a comprehensive (admittedly ever-changing) list of tips to help prepare your resume for the Applicant Tracking Systems, while allowing for some personality:**

- Avoid templates from MS Word or the internet, in general. They usually come with embedded tables and text boxes that could be hard for the ATS to “read” properly.
- Save your resume as a Word .doc – this is safest because there is no telling if the employer updated their system to the latest “.docx”, and “.doc” tends to be easiest scanned. You could always just call HR to find out which format performs best!
- Avoid inserting headers/footers.
- Use a separate line for each new piece of information; try to left justify each line.
- Avoid using borders, frames, special symbols, shading, and colors. I even remove the hyperlink from my email address so it turns back to black (from blue).
- Use 2-3 word combinations for keywords and put them IN CONTEXT, rather than (or in addition to) a list format. If you [deconstruct the job description\(s\)](#) well enough, you’ll know the right keywords to use throughout the resume.
- Avoid the use of columns, text boxes, and tables.
- Use simple fonts that tend are default/universal across all versions of MS Word.
- Do not include initials-credentials after your name at the top. The system could confuse these as part of your last name!



- Include 2 digit months (or full word) and full year when listing dates (e.g. 06/2010-08/2012). Date should be below the company name or to its right.
- Do not use expanded or condensed font - no extra space between letters.
- Use proper capitalization and punctuation. Both can affect how information is parsed and assigned.
- Use full spellings AND abbreviations/acronyms: "Certified Public Accountant" (CPA).
- Use the exact title of the job ...for the title on the resume (in lieu of "objective").
- Include the title of the job in the saved file name (Russ Abbatiello, Career Consultant Resume).
- Include the word "resume" in the file name (to help recruiters find you in places like Monster.com).
- Distinguish phone numbers between your home phone and cell number at the top.
- Repeat the company name/information for any additional titles held at the same company. Same goes for multiple degrees at the same school.
- Use standard heading/section titles "Summary, Skills, Work Experience, Education, Certifications..." so ATS understands the start of each a new section.
- Use a "hard return" after each line.
- Misspellings will surely not do well in the system, so PROOFREAD.
- Be sure the resume displays your fulfillment of the basic requirements for the job, early on. Top of first page, if possible.
- Upload whenever this option is given (rather than copy-paste, or both!)
- Keywords tend to perform better when they are placed early on in the resume.
- Move the most relevant and keyword-rich bullets to the top of each description.
- Avoid excessive use of italics, bold, and underlining.
- Some job descriptions will require xxx number of years' experience using a particular skill or software. Make it easy for ATS to locate this information by including the relevant skills in a horizontal list under your title for each job you held.
- Try using <https://www.jobscan.co/> to compare your resume to job description and see how they match up.