



## Suggestions for Applicant Tracking System Resume Formatting

Applicant tracking systems (ATS) are used frequently in online application processes. In fact, it's estimated that over 50% of companies use this software. It is critical when submitting any application and resume online to know it is likely going through this system. Therefore, prepare your resume according to the following guidelines.

---

### What is ATS?

ATS is filtering software used by a company to sort through applications received. It uses filters, comprised of key words and requirements to divide up applications into a review stack to be read by an actual person and a filtered stack, which are never even seen. Often, ATS initially starts with screening questions, or filters based on:

- Location
- Career Level
- Education Level
- Occupational Area
- Industry

Filters use keywords as a search through your application and resume. Keywords are normally nouns rather than descriptives. These can be:

- a technical skill or term associated with a skill (registered nurse, occupational therapist)
- a title, position, role, or department (manager, sales department)
- a certification, tool used, or specific experience (certified nurse assistant, national certified counselor)

Most filters will have acronyms or other key word options built in to capture information. For example, this is a filter sequence used for a job search:

('occupational therapist' or 'certified occupational therapist' or 'cota' or 'physical therapist' or 'speech language pathologist' or 'speech-language pathologist' or 'speech pathologist')

### Resume Focus for ATS

While your resume content isn't likely to change significantly for an online resume, know that skills are the most important section for ATS. Why? They keyword search described above. Use the job description to look for key skills, terms, or buzz words. Make sure these are then used in your own resume!

#### *Keyword search activity*

Not sure how to locate the most used keywords in a job description? Try wordle.net. By copying and pasting the job description into wordle, you can create a word cloud. The words used most often will appear larger, and you have a great graphic to help you know which words to use in your resume.

## Known formatting Issues for ATS

Certain resume formatting reaps havoc on ATS systems, potentially causing your resume to be read incorrectly. If this happens, it can ultimately cause your resume to be filtered in the 'no' pile when it might not have been otherwise. It's best to save a copy of your resume that is bare bones without fancy formatting. Use the following information to guide you with creating an ATS friendly copy of your resume.

- Use only standard fonts- avoid fancy or non-traditional scripts
- Mixed case capitalization only
- No underlining, bold, or italics
- Applicant Name only on the first line of the resume
- Avoid header and footer notes
- Avoid graphics, charts, or logos of any kind
- Use only standard typewriter symbols
- No accent marks
- No columns. ATS systems can't read columns, and will often read straight across instead of within each column format.
- Avoid borders or lines (especially if these bump against text in your document)
- Exclude home address, unless you do not mind if this is a searchable feature
- Avoid PDF, DOCX, WPD, WPS, or HTML formats. Stick to a .doc file format or .rtf file
- Standard bullet points are fine; however, avoid any special characters or customized bullets

---

*Resource developed with the assistance of [optimalresume.com](http://optimalresume.com)*

Center for Personal and Professional Development • Tucker Student Center Suite 157  
[www.gardner-webb.edu/career](http://www.gardner-webb.edu/career)



/GWUCareer



/Gardner-Webb University Career Development



/GWUCareer



/GWUCareer



/GWUCareer