

Applicant Tracking Systems

Employers describe the job hiring process as “drinking from a firehose.” By this they mean there are so many job applicants, it is overwhelming.

To help manage the hiring process, many employers use computerized Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS). These systems are programmed to scan resumes for specific keywords, former employers, years of experience and schools attended. Only resumes matching the specific criteria preprogramed by employers are referred on to hiring managers.

Roughly 25 percent of applicants make it through the ATS screening process. There are several things you can do to improve the chances of being in that 25 percent:

- Match keywords in your resume to key phrases from the employer’s job description. This will mean you have to customize your resume for each job.
- Use keywords throughout your resume, not just in one section. Having a qualifications or skills section at the top of your resume emphasizes keywords from the experience section.
- Use both the job description and the employer’s web site to help identify keywords. The web site can help you get a sense of the company culture, what they focus on and value. That can guide you as you tailor your resume for the job.
- Do not attempt to “game” the system by over using keywords where they do not belong.
- Cite specific skills, software, certifications or techniques you have that are common in your field, such as “Microsoft Excel,” “use of pivot tables,” or “market research.”
- Spell out acronyms for professional organizations, certifications and other industry lingo. For example, use both “CPA” and “Certified Public Accountant” because you don’t know which one the employer has programmed the system to search for.
- Avoid overly creative wording, as the computer may match such words to what the employer is looking for. Some ATS systems are programmed to ignore vague and generic words such as “independent worker,” “successful,” etc. Therefore, use only job specific language and avoid buzzwords words.
- Include your postal address, but do not put it in the header or footer of the paper, as many ATS ignore those sections.
- Avoid graphics, logos or tables as they can confuse ATS, which may lead to it rejecting your resume.
- Use only common fonts and avoid font sizes less than 11 points.

Sources:

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