

# Beat the Robots: How to Get Your Resume Past the System & Into Human Hands

Landing an interview for a position in a giant organization can feel impossible if you don't have [any personal connections](#). People often blame the sheer volume of resumes that are submitted—HR simply can't review them all with enough detail to see what a perfect candidate you are! And this is partially true—one study suggests that recruiters spend [only six seconds looking at each resume](#). However, many resumes are trashed before they're even seen by human eyes. How is that possible?

Here's how: Many large organizations rely on applicant tracking systems (ATS) to help pre-filter resumes. The systems work by scanning resumes for contextual keywords and key phrases, mathematically scoring them for relevance, and sending only the most qualified ones through for human review. Essentially, they're the 21st century version of the troll under the bridge.

Undoubtedly, this saves HR managers the time and trouble of sorting through irrelevant, underprepared, and weak resumes to find the golden candidates. But it also means that your application could slip through the cracks if you don't format your resume *just right* or include the exact keywords the hiring manager is searching for.

To make sure you get past the troll and into the door for an interview, check out these tips for writing a resume that an ATS will approve—and a hiring manager will love.

## 1. Keep Formatting Simple

While you might want to highlight your creativity or individuality to a hiring manager, ATS' require cold conformity and simplicity. Therefore, you'll need to delete any extra touches you've added to your resume, like logos, pictures, symbols, and shadings. Also stick to standard resume formatting in a normal font like Arial, Courier, or Times New Roman—the ATS can't read fancy fonts and will reject your resume out of confusion.

Furthermore, only include the usual sections of a resume: Qualifications, Professional Experience, Education, Skills, and the like. Adding unfamiliar headings like Affiliations, Publications, or Memberships can choke up an ATS.

Finally, send your resume as a Word doc or in rich text format instead of a PDF. Though ATS software is becoming better at reading PDFs, it can still miss important things when trying to process them.

## 2. Nail the Correct Keywords

For any profession, there's always lingo, software, responsibilities, basic skills, and licenses or certificates associated with performing the job well—and an ATS will be looking for key phrases and contextual information related to those qualifications. To make sure the software recognizes that you're a good fit for the job, use these tips to successfully keyword optimize your resume:

- Include verb phrases and skills written in the job description [on your own resume](#). These are very likely to be the same keywords and phrases the hiring manager has programmed the ATS to pick up—"project manager," "Final Cut Pro," or "social media marketing," for example.
- Try services like [Wordle](#) and [TagCrowd](#) to help you figure out which keywords to focus on. Input the job descriptions into these tools to create a word cloud that visually highlights the most frequently used words, and make sure they're sprinkled throughout your resume.
- Use both the acronym and the spelled-out form of any given title, certification, or organization, so you're set regardless of which format the ATS is looking for. For example: Certified Public Accountant (CPA).

An important note here: Don't go overboard. In the past, people thought that they could exploit the system by overstuffing their resumes with keywords, thus ranking them higher in the eyes of the ATS. This is a very bad idea: Not only is the software sophisticated enough to see this kind of keyword stuffing, if your resume does make it into human hands, no one will be impressed by a nonsensical resume dressed to the nines in keywords.

Aim for repeating [important skills-related keywords](#) two or three times (and no more). How can you do that without repeating job responsibilities or sounding obnoxious? Try this:

## 3. Ditch the Career Objective Section

Career objective sections are kind of a waste of space. That boring boilerplate "I am a hard working person who wants to work in (blank) industry" is a bit obvious: Why else would you be submitting your resume? Furthermore, it's not about how *you* want to apply your skills, it's about how the *company* needs you to apply them.

Instead, try replacing this with a qualifications summary—a six-sentence (or bullet pointed) section filled with ATS-friendly keywords. Even better, use those six sentences to concisely present the crème of the crop of your achievements, major skills, and important experiences.

By doing this, you're killing two birds with one stone: You're appeasing the ATS with keywords, and you're also giving the hiring manager the juicy, important bits right at the top where he or she can quickly scan and understand the value you would bring the company.

## 4. Don't Make Any Spelling Mistakes

Seriously, spelling mistakes are the death of your resume. While a human being can at least figure out what you mean (before [tossing your resume into the trash](#) in disapproval), an ATS will terminate you immediately because it will simply have no idea what you're talking about. So double, triple, and quadruple check your resume before sending it in. Have someone else do the same. Spelling mistakes can be easily avoided if you're careful.

At the end of the day, once your resume passes the unfailing eye of the ATS, it will then be scrutinized by a human eye. The good news is that all of the advice for optimizing your resume for ATS is simply good resume practice. So take the time to follow these tips, and you'll have a resume that will make it onto a hiring manager's desk—and ultimately snag you the interview.