



Radford
UNIVERSITY

Career and Talent
Development

What is ATS

Career Guide

Radford Career and Talent Development

Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS): How to Make Your Resume ATS-Friendly

What is ATS?

Applicant Tracking System (ATS) is software that employers use to collect, organize, and screen job applications. It scans resumes for relevant keywords, skills, education, and experience before a recruiter reviews them. This software is often used to help recruiters identify candidates whose resumes best match the qualifications listed in a job posting.

How ATS Screens Resumes

The ATS looks for:

- Keywords from the job description
- Relevant experience, skills, and certifications/licenses as appropriate
- Education, degrees, and work experience

Tip: Tailoring your resume to each job description increases your chances of being identified as a strong match. If your resume doesn't match the job description, it may rank/score lower, even if you're qualified.

ATS Resume Best Practices

Use Standard Formatting

- Use a simple, one-column layout.
- Choose (Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri,).
- Use clear, standard section headings: Education, Experience, Skills, Certifications
- Save as a PDF (as long as PDF is accepted) only submit as a Word document (doc or docx) if a PDF file is not compatible with the application portal. (Never image files).

Tailor Your Resume

- Read the job description carefully.
- Include keywords throughout your resume.
- Match employer terminology ("Project Management" instead of "Managing Projects") when appropriate.

Avoid These ATS Mistakes

- Using tables or text boxes
- Using graphics, icons, or logos (or use of images instead of text)
- Using colored or uncommon fonts, symbols, or excessive formatting
- Placing important information (such as your contact info) in headers or footers
- Copying the job description word-for-word or keyword stuffing (repeating keywords unnaturally)

Before You Submit

- Tailor content to the job description
- Verify contact information and ensure it is easy to find
- Ensure skills match the job posting
- Check for spelling and grammar errors
- Include relevant keywords naturally
- Use standard section headings
- Save the File in an appropriate format

Remember

ATS helps employers organize applications, but it doesn't replace human recruiters. Once your resume passes the ATS, it should still be clear, professional, and achievement-focused for the hiring manager.

Need help?

Schedule an appointment with Radford University's Career and Talent Development Center to review your resume, cover letter, or other application materials before submitting.