

Getting Over the ATS Fear: How to Optimize Your Job Application



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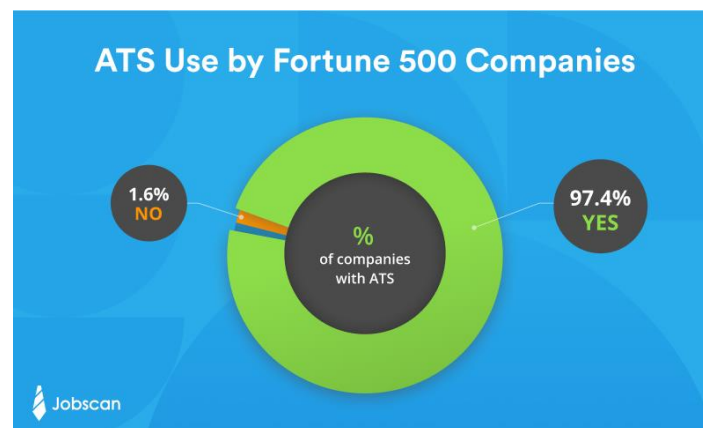
If you've ever applied for a job online, chances are you've come across the term ATS, which stands for Applicant Tracking System. ATS is a software companies use to streamline the hiring process. It also creates anxiety and fear among job seekers. Many worry that their applications may get lost or overlooked in the digital abyss. With the proper knowledge, strategies, and review, you can overcome the ATS fear and increase your chances of getting noticed by potential employers. This article provides practical tips for optimizing your job application and conquering the ATS hurdle.

Understanding the Purpose of ATS

Applicant Tracking System (ATS) is designed to help recruiters efficiently manage the overwhelming volume of applications they receive. Most job posting organizations, such as LinkedIn, Indeed, Glassdoor, and many companies, use ATS.

However, they are all designed for the same thing - to weed out resumes that do not meet these keywords to eliminate the bulk of unwanted applications that don't meet the criteria. ATS scans cover letters and resumes for specific keywords, qualifications, and job requirements. By understanding this process, you can tailor your resume to closely match what the ATS is searching for without copying the job posting verbatim. Begin by carefully reviewing the job description and identifying the relevant keywords and skills the employer seeks.

Understand Who Uses ATS



Some recruiters will look at every single application, but many won't. A survey by [Harvard Business School](#) revealed that "more than 90% of employers [...] initially filter or rank potential middle-skills (94%) and high-skills (92%) candidates" by criteria like skills, credentials, and years of experience. The report states, "A recruiter will never see that candidate's application, even though it might fill all of the employer's requirements."

Resume Formatting

An ATS-friendly resume format is crucial to maximize your chances of getting past the screen. Avoid using complex templates or fancy designs, which can confuse the system. Opt for a simple, well-structured resume with clear section headings and bullet points. Do not mix the bullet points by using boxes or arrows. Stick with the bullets. Use standard fonts (preferred Calibri or Ariel), with font sizes of either 11

or 12pt., and formats to ensure compatibility when the ATS scans your application. Avoid overusing bolding – use bolding only for your name and section headers. Minimize underlining as it is also confusing. Eliminate tables or columns, as ATS cannot read those and sees them as an error. Also, save your resume in a universally readable format like PDF or Word.

Optimizing Your Keywords

Keywords play a significant role in determining whether your application passes through the ATS. Incorporate relevant keywords throughout your resume and cover letter. Include industry-specific terms and essential job requirements matching the employer's criteria. Avoid overloading your document with excessive keywords, as this can appear unnatural to both the ATS and the human reviewer. Never put an acronym in a resume without spelling it out first, followed by the acronym in parenthesis. Never assume the reader knows what the acronym stands for.

Customizing Your Cover Letter

While using a generic cover letter for every application may be tempting, customizing your cover letter for each role can significantly boost your chances of success. See if you can find the job description from the company you are applying to to find the key requirements and company values. Or use your similar job description to identify the keywords and job requirements. If not, look on Google for a job description with keywords and requirements to fit the job you seek. Then, tailor your cover letter to highlight your relevant skills and experiences that directly address these needs. This customization will make your application stand out to the ATS and the hiring manager.

Utilizing Job Boards and Networking



ATS is not the only method of finding job opportunities. Take advantage of job boards and networking events to increase your visibility and bypass the ATS altogether. Online and offline networking can provide you with referrals and direct contact with recruiters or hiring managers. Leverage your professional connections through platforms like LinkedIn and attend industry-related events to expand your network. Network on LinkedIn, Meta groups, friends, family, previous managers, and even join some meetups or associations to find leads to job openings. Get bold and courageous to reach out.

Testing and Reviewing Your Application

Before submitting your application, it's crucial to proofread and test your documents. Carefully review your resume, cover letter, and other required documents for grammar and spelling errors. Ensure that the formatting appears consistent and professional. After making necessary edits, submit a test application through a free ATS scanner, such as [JobScan](#) or [Skillsyncer](#), and analyze the results. ATS usually scores from 0-100, giving you an idea of where you will be in the applicant pool. Anything less than 50 usually does not make it into the applicant pool. The test will help you assess how well your application is recognized and make any necessary adjustments. There are many variables within ATS systems, but they are generally close in the scoring. Also, run your resume and cover letter by friends, family, and colleagues, giving you feedback on readability and clarity.

"Many applicants are unaware of what an Applicant Tracking System is, let alone how it functions to select candidates to preview. To land a job, it's essential to understand how an ATS works and apply that knowledge to creating a resume."

— [Jazlyn Unbedacht](#), Resume Expert

Getting over the ATS fear is not as daunting as it may initially seem. By understanding the purpose of ATS, optimizing your keywords, customizing your cover letter, utilizing job boards and networking, and testing your application, you can significantly increase your chances of getting through the system and landing the desired job. Remember, the ATS is merely a tool used by recruiters, and your focus should be on presenting yourself as the best candidate for the role. So, follow these tips, take a deep breath, and let your qualifications and skills shine through the ATS barrier. If you aren't making headway, hire a good resume writer with experience creating a good ATS-friendly resume. Good luck in your job search!