



# APPLICANT TRACKING SYSTEMS

## Decoding the Job Search: How to Beat the Applicant Tracking System (ATS)

### What is an Applicant Tracking System (ATS)?

A recruiter or HR professional and hiring manager create job descriptions with the skills, experience and qualifications that they find the most desirable; i.e., “key words” for an open position. **It’s the key words that determine which resumes are identified for further consideration.** Simply put, **if your resume doesn’t contain a number of these key words, your resume won’t be found.** It doesn’t matter how qualified you are, it’s simply an algorithmic formula.

### So now that you know what an ATS is, here’s how to beat it:

1. Read job descriptions closely and **if you have [80%] of the qualifications, apply.** When Human Resource or hiring managers write job descriptions they throw in everything they would love to have, but since job functions are changing so rapidly, they are looking for trainable candidates. If you have [80%] of the skills they need, they can teach you the rest.
2. **If you legitimately have many of the skills in the job description, customize your resume to contain the “key words” that are in the posting.** Don’t try to be fancy and use synonymous words, as only the exact words will allow the recruiter conducting the search to find your resume.
3. ATS systems are a little finicky, so **cool fonts, colors other than black text on white, and some other graphic elements are out.** Most of the algorithms won’t be able to decipher your resume if it is uploaded this way.
4. Find a way to follow up. **If you really think you are qualified and excited about a job, reach out to your network through LinkedIn and other channels and see if anyone works for the company.** Send them a note or call them and see if they would be willing to let the recruiter know that you are interested in the job and that they know you. That is usually enough to have them search the ATS and find your resume.
5. **Repeat this for every job you apply for** and truly customize your resume with key words that describe your skills and experience to get more traction in your job search.

The job search process can be complex, frustrating, and exhilarating all at the same time. However, don’t ever let technology stand between you and a job you really want and are qualified for. Now that you know how to beat the ATS, change your approach and you are sure to be successful in landing that new job.

**Adapted from:** Steinfeld, Trudy. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/trudysteinfeld/2016/05/31/decoding-the-job-search-how-to-beat-the-ats-applicant-tracking-system/#692133446d84>. Accessed 01.26.2018

