



5

Essential Sections Your Resume Must Have to be ATS-Friendly

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In today's competitive job market, getting your resume seen by the right people is harder than ever.

With most companies using Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) to filter applications, it's crucial to have a resume that not only looks good but also passes the ATS test. Unfortunately, even the most qualified candidates can be overlooked if their resume doesn't meet the specific criteria these systems look for.

But don't worry—I've got you covered! This guide will walk you through the 5 essential sections every resume must have to be ATS-friendly.

Whether you're just starting to build your resume or want to optimize your existing one, this blueprint will ensure you're on the right track.

By following these steps, you'll maximize your chances of getting your resume past the ATS and into the hands of a hiring manager. It's time to create a resume that works for you, not against you.



Section 1 - Contact Information

The **Contact Information** section is crucial for ensuring recruiters and ATS systems can easily identify and contact you. Placed at the very top of your resume, this section should be clear, professional, and concise to set the right tone.

What to Include:

- **Phone Number:** Use a direct phone number where you can be reached easily. Avoid listing multiple numbers, as this can be confusing for recruiters. It's also important to make sure your voicemail is set up and professional, in case you miss a call.
- **Professional Email Address:** This is essential. Use a simple, professional email format, ideally containing your name (e.g., john.smith@email.com). Avoid using outdated providers or unprofessional formats (e.g., funname123@email.com).
- **LinkedIn Profile (Optional):** If you have an optimized LinkedIn profile, including a link here can be advantageous. It gives recruiters an opportunity to learn more about your professional background and see recommendations or endorsements. Ensure your profile URL is clean and professional (e.g., [linkedin.com/in/johnsmith](https://www.linkedin.com/in/johnsmith) rather than [linkedin.com/in/johnsmith12345abc](https://www.linkedin.com/in/johnsmith12345abc)).
- **Location (City, State):** You don't need to include your full home address anymore; most employers don't require it. Including your city and state (or just city) is enough to show that you are in the same area as the job or if you're open to relocating.

Section 1 - Contact Information cont'd

What Not to Include:

- **Full Home Address:** Not needed and could be a privacy concern.
- **Multiple Contact Methods:** Stick to one phone number and one email address for clarity.
- **Personal Details:** Avoid including age, marital status, or social media links unless they are relevant (e.g., LinkedIn).

Placement Tips:

- Position this section at the very top of your resume, aligned to the left or centered for easy visibility.
- Avoid placing information in headers or footers, as ATS systems may not read these areas properly.



Section 2 - Professional Summary or Objective

The **Professional Summary or Objective** is a brief, impactful section that introduces your background, skills, and what you offer. It should be tailored to each job application to align your experience with the employer's needs.

What to Include:

- **Concise Overview:** A 3-4 sentence summary highlighting your professional background, skills, and expertise.
- **Key Skills and Experience:** Emphasize relevant skills and accomplishments that match the job description.
- **Value Proposition:** Clearly state what you bring to the table and how you can add value to the role.

Examples:

- *“Experienced Marketing Manager with 10+ years in digital marketing and campaign management. Proven track record of increasing ROI and enhancing brand presence. Skilled in data analytics, SEO, and content strategy.”*
- *“Results-driven Project Manager with expertise in leading cross-functional teams to deliver projects on time and within budget. Skilled in Agile methodologies, team leadership, and process improvement.”*

Section 2 - Professional Summary or Objective cont'd

What Not to Include:

- Generic Statements: Avoid vague phrases like “seeking a challenging position.” Instead, focus on specific skills and accomplishments.
- Personal Goals: Keep the focus on what you can do for the company, not what you want to gain from the role.

Placement Tips:

- Position the summary directly below your contact information to quickly capture the recruiter's attention.
- Keep it brief (3-4 sentences) and ensure it's tailored for the specific job to increase your chances of passing the ATS scan and making an impact.



Section 3 - Core Competencies/Skills

The **Core Competencies/Skills** section is a crucial part of an ATS-friendly resume. It provides a quick snapshot of your key skills and expertise, ensuring that both ATS systems and recruiters can easily match your abilities with the job requirements.

What to Include:

- **Relevant Skills:** List 6-12 skills that align with the job description and industry. Focus on those that are highly relevant to the role you're applying for.
- **Keywords:** Incorporate specific keywords and phrases from the job posting to increase your chances of passing ATS filters.
- **Technical and Soft Skills:** Include a balanced mix of technical skills (e.g., "Data Analysis, Project Management") and soft skills (e.g., "Leadership, Communication").

Examples:

- *"Project Management | Data Analysis | Cross-Functional Team Leadership | Process Improvement | CRM Tools | Microsoft Excel"*
- *"SEO | Content Strategy | Digital Marketing | Social Media Management | Branding | Copywriting"*

Section 3 - Core Competencies/Skills cont'd

What Not to Include:

- **Overly General Skills:** Avoid vague terms like “hardworking” or “dedicated.” Instead, focus on specific, measurable skills.
- **Irrelevant Skills:** Leave out skills that don’t directly relate to the role, as they may distract from the key qualifications the employer is looking for.

Placement Tips:

- Position the Core Competencies/Skills section below your professional summary. This allows ATS systems and recruiters to quickly identify the skills that match the job requirements.
- Use a simple, bullet-point or column format to make this section easy to scan for both ATS systems and human readers.



Section 4 - Professional Experience

The **Professional Experience** section is the most critical part of your resume, demonstrating your skills, achievements, and career progression. Organized in reverse chronological order, it highlights your most recent and relevant roles first, making it easy for ATS systems and recruiters to assess your qualifications.

What to Include:

- **Job Title, Company Name, Location, Dates: Format each entry as follows:**
 - Job Title – Company Name, City, State (Month/Year – Month/Year)
 - Ensure the dates are consistent and formatted uniformly for ATS compatibility.
- **Key Achievements and Responsibilities:** Include 3-5 bullet points per role, focusing on:
 - Specific achievements and responsibilities relevant to the job you're applying for.
 - Quantifiable outcomes (e.g., "Increased sales by 20%" or "Managed a team of 10").
 - Action verbs that convey leadership and impact (e.g., "Led," "Implemented," "Developed").

Section 4 - Professional Experience

cont'd

Examples:

- Project Manager – ABC Company, New York, NY (Jan 2018 – Present)
 - Led cross-functional teams to complete projects 25% ahead of schedule, increasing client satisfaction by 30%.
 - Managed budgets up to \$500,000, ensuring projects remained within financial constraints.
 - Implemented new project management software, reducing tracking time by 50%.
- Marketing Specialist – XYZ Corp, Chicago, IL (Mar 2015 – Dec 2017)
 - Increased website traffic by 40% through targeted SEO strategies and social media campaigns.
 - Developed and launched successful marketing campaigns, resulting in a 15% increase in revenue.
 - Collaborated with sales teams to create marketing collateral, improving lead conversion rates by 20%.

Section 4 - Professional Experience cont'd

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Section 5 - Education

The **Education** section provides an overview of your academic background and relevant certifications. This section should be concise and focused on education that directly enhances your profile and aligns with the job you're applying for.

What to Include:

- **Degree, Institution Name, Location, Dates: Format each entry as follows:**
 - Degree – Institution Name, City, State (Month/Year of Graduation)
 - **Example:** *Bachelor of Science in Marketing – University of Texas, Austin, TX (May 2015)*
 - **Relevant Coursework or Honors (Optional):** Include if they directly relate to the role (e.g., "Coursework in Data Analysis and Project Management").
 - **Certifications:** If you have certifications that strengthen your application, list them under this section or create a separate section for "Certifications."
 - **Professional Development:** List any completed professional development courses relevant to the job (e.g., "Project Management Professional (PMP)" or "Google Analytics Certification").

Section 5 - Education cont'd

Examples:

- Master of Business Administration – Harvard Business School, Boston, MA (June 2018)
- Bachelor of Science in Computer Science – Stanford University, Stanford, CA (May 2014)
- Certified ScrumMaster (CSM) – Scrum Alliance (March 2020)

What Not to Include:

- High School Diploma: If you have a college degree, there's no need to include high school information.
- Irrelevant Degrees: Focus on the highest and most relevant degree or certification you have. If you have multiple degrees, choose the one most aligned with the role.
- Outdated or Unnecessary Details: Avoid including GPA unless it is specifically requested or was exceptional and recent (e.g., graduated within the last 2 years).

Placement Tips:

- Position the Education section below the Professional Experience section to highlight your hands-on experience first, which is often more important for recruiters.
- Keep this section simple and straightforward, using a clean format for easy ATS scanning.
- If you have certifications that add significant value to your profile, consider placing them in a separate "Certifications" section below or next to the Education section.



Section 6 - Optional Sections

The **Optional Sections** of your resume provide an opportunity to showcase certifications, technical skills, volunteer work, or military experience that enhances your profile. These sections can be tailored to fit the specific job you're applying for and highlight relevant qualifications that set you apart.

Certifications:

- List professional certifications that add value to the role (e.g., "PMP, Certified ScrumMaster (CSM), Google Analytics Certified").
- Format each certification as follows:
- Certification Name – Certifying Organization (Month/Year Obtained)
- Example: *Project Management Professional (PMP) – Project Management Institute (March 2021)*

Technical Skills:

- Include a Technical Skills section if the role requires proficiency with specific tools or software (e.g., "Microsoft Excel, Salesforce, Tableau").
- Format these skills in a bullet or column format for easy scanning by ATS systems and recruiters.
- Tailor the list to match the technical requirements mentioned in the job description.

Section 6 - Optional Sections cont'd

Volunteer Work:

- List volunteer roles that demonstrate skills relevant to the job you're applying for (e.g., leadership, project management, technical skills).
- Format each entry as follows:
- Role – Organization Name, Location (Month/Year – Month/Year)
- *Example: Volunteer Project Coordinator – Habitat for Humanity, Denver, CO (June 2018 – Present)*
- Highlight any achievements or responsibilities in 1-2 bullet points (e.g., "Led a team of 20 volunteers to complete housing projects on time and within budget").

Military Experience:

- Include a Military Experience section if you have relevant service background. This is particularly valuable if the skills gained in the military align with the job you're applying for (e.g., leadership, technical expertise, logistics).
- Format each entry as follows:
- Rank/Role – Branch of Service, Location (Month/Year – Month/Year)
- *Example: Operations Specialist – U.S. Navy, Norfolk, VA (Jan 2010 – Dec 2016)*
- Highlight transferable skills and key accomplishments (e.g., "Managed logistics for a unit of 200 personnel, ensuring 100% mission readiness" or "Led cross-functional teams to improve operational efficiency by 25%").

Section 6 - Optional Sections cont'd

What Not to Include:

- **Irrelevant Certifications or Skills:** Avoid listing certifications or skills that don't align with the job requirements, as they may distract from your qualifications.
- **Personal Interests:** Unless your interests are directly relevant to the job or industry, it's best to leave them off the resume.
- **Outdated Information:** Focus on recent and relevant volunteer roles or certifications that demonstrate current skills and knowledge.

Placement Tips:

- Position additional sections like Certifications and Technical Skills below the Education section, or as a standalone section if they are particularly important to the job.
- If you have Military Experience, place it where it aligns best with your professional experience, such as directly below the Professional Experience section, especially if it demonstrates key leadership or technical skills.
- Use a simple, consistent format for each section to maintain clarity and ATS compatibility.



File Formatting Tips for ATS Compatibility

Formatting Tips for ATS Compatibility:

- File Format: Save as a .docx or simple PDF (ensure the PDF is ATS-compatible before submitting).
- Font: Use standard fonts like Arial, Calibri, or Times New Roman (10-12 point size).
- Sections: Use clear headings (e.g., “Professional Experience,” “Education”).
- Simple Layout: Avoid tables, graphics, columns, or images. Stick to a single-column format.
- Consistent Formatting: Ensure bullet points, spacing, and font size are consistent throughout the document.



Essential ATS-Friendly Resume Section Check List

- ☐ Contact Information
- ☐ Professional Summary or Objective (3-4 Sentences)
- ☐ Core Competencies and Skills
- ☐ Professional Experience (reverse chronological order)
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Additional Sections (Certifications, Technical Skills, Volunteer Work, Military Service)



Thank You!

I hope you found this helpful for ensuring your resume is ATS Compatible. If your a job seeker over the age of 40 and want to stay ahead in your job search, subscribe to our newsletter and receive exclusive tips, AI Hacks and strategies delivered straight to your inbox!

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