Strive to Thrive

Career Tips For Ted Rogers School Students

Business CAREER HUB

These reports leverage the expertise of BCH staff to share best practices for students & alumni.

What are Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)?

- An Applicant Tracking System (ATS) is a type of software that enables recruiters and employers to track applicants and handle large amounts of resume data electronically.

- Almost all recruiters, large employers, and online job boards use some form of Applicant Tracking System (ATS) for talent acquisition, candidate relationship management, and data collection.

- These tools support the recruiter's efforts and streamline the recruitment process by collecting, scanning and analyzing resumes that enter the database using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology.

- Recruiters also use ATS' to compare and select candidates by rating, ranking, and selecting applicants that are the best match for specific job postings.

Myth	Truth
❌ All applicant Tracking Systems are the same	✅ There is a serious **misconception** that all ATS's are the same but in reality there is no 'one-size-fits-all'. Easy system has its own nuances - some ATS' prefer PDF, while others work best reading Word files. While they have the same intended purpose, the functionality and features can vary from system to system.
❌ The ATS is responsible for rejecting your application	✅ This is **not true** one bit! Most of the system's features can't be activated until a human comes along and makes a decision on the profile before making any decisions. Ultimately, it is a recruiter or hiring manager that looks at all applications that are sent for a certain position, so do not fall for the ATS misconception. Always write your resume for the human reading it.

Technology has changed how resumes are received, stored, sorted, and viewed by employers and recruiters. If you apply the following techniques to create technology-friendly resumes, you will significantly increase the chances that your resume will be found, read, and selected for the next step in the recruitment process.

Making a Resume ATS-Optimized

When applying to any company, you need to be aware that alongside recruiters viewing your application, many of these companies also use applicant tracking systems. It's a safe assumption to make that if you are applying for a role online, your application is being put through some version of an ATS.

Having this knowledge can help applicants optimize and tailor their resumes for both recruiters and ATS's to get the best results possible. To be effective, your resume needs to be optimized to be scanned through an ATS in order for it to rate, rank, and select the resume for the recruiter to read.

ATS-friendly resumes are much like traditional resumes, but require specific formatting and a greater emphasis on enhancing the document's "scannability".

The content must be tailored to the requirements of the target market by incorporating the right keywords and key phrases.

That said, it is possible to format an ATS-friendly resume that includes visually creative elements, ensuring that it works well for both technology systems and to appeal to humans.

Keywords and key phrases are the most important ingredients in an ATS-optimized resume.

Refine your job search to be more effective. Think **QUALITY** over **QUANTITY** in terms of the application you make. Do not spend endless hours a week online filing dozens of applications. Focus on telling your story, showcasing your value and highlighting the impact you can make through your work.

Tips for Creating ATS-Optimized Resumes

Use standard fonts that are common to most systems. Avoid fancy font styles and shadows. If you use boldface, underlines, italics, and capital letters, ensure that the text remains easy to read.

Use a reverse chronological resume format. Break out every position under "experience" and "education" so that the ATS can calculate the time in each role correctly. Avoid inserting content in headers and footers.

Include visually creative elements but be aware that some ATS may not read graphic elements. If you include logos, pictures, charts, colors, and other visuals, make certain you also include associated written content.

Think like a recruiter. Whenever possible, use nouns that recruiters are likely to enter into their ATS system when trying to identify a certain type of candidate.
For example, a recruiter will probably not use "designed artwork" to search for a candidate. Nouns such as "artwork designer" or "designer of artwork" or "artwork design" are more likely options.

Utilizing keywords in your resume is a great way to help you communicate your story and value by speaking the language of the role and showcase how your experience aligns with the needs of the position.

Review the job description to determine relevant skills and keywords that you can reflect in your resume and cover letter. Look at the first 3-5 qualifications and 3-5 duties and ensure that you are using that verbiage each time you submit a resume for a job opportunity.

Consider using many variations of keywords in your resume by strategically using synonyms of words throughout.

For example, use synonyms such as "customer relationship management" and "client relationship management." Consider variations such as "operational efficiencies" and "continuous improvements." Thoughtfully use different words with similar meanings such as "processes," "procedures," "standards," "protocols," and "regulations" throughout.

ALWAYS consider the human reader. In the end, a person will be reading the document, so your grammar needs to be impeccable and the resume structure needs to be clean and organized.

Things to Avoid

Applying to Multiple Random Jobs

Many ATS's create "candidate profiles" for everyone who applies to roles that use the system, and these profiles keep a record of all of the jobs each candidate has applied for. If you are applying to multiple roles at the same company, that are completely different or unrelated, this sends the message of 'desperation' or that you are not self-aware about your skill set. It can also confuse the recruiter because they are not able to tell what you are actually interested in and can ultimately reduce your chances in receiving a call-back.

Note: this does not mean that you have to meet every single requirement. If you meet 60-70% of the core skills the job is looking for, you should submit an application.

Using Generic Resumes

Writing a general resume for all positions is not an effective job search strategy and is widely known in the recruitment world as the "Spray and Pray" technique. It is critical that you always customize your resume for each job you apply to because it will improve your chances of being recognized as a great candidate.

Copy and Pasting or Hiding Content From the Job Description

Keywords are the key to your success, but do not copy and paste the job description and skills exactly as written onto the resume nor should you try to hide these keywords in white text or in the margins of the resume. Your goal as a job seeker is not to "scam" the system. Include keywords and phrases from the job posting, but don't overdo it in an attempt to "trick the system."

One might think that pasting the complete job posting into a resume will enable it to rise to the top of the list; however, many ATS's flag resumes that match too perfectly as suspicious. Even if the resume were to come to the top of the list of potential candidates, a savvy recruiter will quickly disqualify the person as soon as they see their own job posting embedded into the application.

Check Out Jobscan

If you want to see how an applicant tracking system works before sending your application to a company, click here to put your resume to the test, and see firsthand how your resume gets processed in an ATS..

Extra Help

If you need help editing your cover letter or resume, you can also book a 15-min drop-in with one of the Career and/or Co-op Consultants. We also offer 30-minute or 1-hour appointments to support you in your job search.

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Writing a Resume
Communicating with Confidence
Interpersonal Communication
Learning Personal Branding
Delivering an Authentic Elevator Pitch

Visit the Business Career Hub

Employer Events

The BCH hosts several employer events to prepare you for your professional career. Refer to your weekly 'BCH Careers Newsletter' for a list of upcoming events.

Bootcamps/Prep Programs

Advance your technical and soft skills, earn digital badges, and gain an advantage in today's workforce through bootcamps. Click here to register for current bootcamps.

Coaching & Mock Interview

For career coaching, interview prep and more, schedule a 1:1 appointment with a Career Consultant or a Co-op Coordinator.

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Career Consultant Contributor
Sarah Anderson
Sarah is a Career Consultant with 5+ years of experience in the human resource, recruitment, and career services industry. She is passionate about helping clients communicate their value using a strengths-based approach to land meaningful work.

Student Contributor
Priyanka Badhan
Priyanka is currently a 2nd year BTM undergrad student working as a Project Coordinator at the BCH, creating and implementing projects in a high quality manner. She is also actively seeking internships.

Data Sources

1. https://www.jobscan.co/blog/8-things-you-need-to-know-about-applicant-tracking-systems/
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