

Can a robot read your resume?

Applicant Tracking System

A growing number of organisations use robots, known as an **Applicant Tracking System** (ATS) to assist with the recruitment process by screening applications from prospective employees. Applications can be rejected because the system cannot read the content. ATS categorises into Education, Contact Information, Skills and Work Experience.

What you need to know

- **Keywords:** Identify keywords from the employer's website, job advertisement and position description. Include these words in your resume, cover letter and response to selection criteria. Make sure you include all the skills most relevant to the job. The higher the number of keywords, the higher your application will rank. **Remember** a human will end up reading it, so don't overdo it, consider using each keyword 2-3 times across your resume, cover letter, and selection criteria or written response.
- **Contextual Searches:** This is a more sophisticated method and determines a match based on the relevance of keywords within context. Think about whether the keywords have relevance to your work history and/or education; ensure your documents are tailored to the employers' application material.
- **Application Date and Time:** Applications can be ranked by the date and time they were received, i.e. a first-in-line approach. This is not a common method, but is still used.

Recommendations

- **Tailor:** maximise the number of keywords in the content of your application, but use them in context and don't overuse them; intersperse them through your cover letter, resume, and selection criteria or written response. Mention specific and advanced skills in relation to keywords.
- **Research:** ensure keywords exactly match the words mentioned in the position description and job advertisement; use the employer website for keyword guidance – research company culture and employee values.
- **Count:** use **Ctrl+F** to count the number of times you have used a particular keyword; remember do not over-saturate. If your application gets through the ATS to a human reader it needs to be coherent, not repetitive.
- **Use full words:** do not use abbreviations in applications – the software won't read them – it can read acronyms however (i.e. electronic medical records – EMR, Content Management System - CMS).
- **Avoid using the following:**

Tables	Columns	Borders	Clipart	Fancy fonts
Photos	Charts	Headers/Footers	Colours	Infographics

(the scanner **cannot** read these, and your application may look blank or unreadable)

- Bullet points, bold text and tabs are **recommended**. As is placing dates after your work experience:
James Cook University, Student Liaison Officer, 01/01/2018 – 31/12/2019
- Submit your application as a **Microsoft Word** document – a PDF may cause scanning errors. If you are emailing directly to a person, use PDF to preserve formatting.
- Use **sans-serif fonts** such as Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, Tahoma, Franklin Gothic.
- Keep your application simple, clean and uncluttered to increase the likelihood the ATS will be able to read it (e.g. bullet points instead of paragraphs, avoid creative wording and descriptions, information in headers and footers may be ignored by the algorithms). **Remember**, if your application gets through the ATS it will be read by a human – so it needs to be intelligible to non-robot eyes as well.