Chapter 4: Writing a Resume That Wins Interviews

Proper Resume Formatting for ATS-Compatibility

Most employers use Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) to automate and manage the hiring process. In addition to using the proper keywords to show that you're a highly qualified candidate, you must use clean formatting for your resume to help ensure it will load into the ATS properly.

Formatting specifics:

- The most widely accepted resume format is the Word 2003 .doc. Only upload a PDF or Word .docx if the online application system lists those as compatible formats.

- Many ATS can now handle tables, but most read the information from left to right by rows. This can combine multiple phrases together, making them hard to understand. Avoid using multiple columns for the same reason.

- Use common fonts (I like Arial) and avoid advanced formatting options like small caps or kerning.

- Solid round black bullets are fine but don't use fancy ones or sub-bullets as they look cluttered.

- Standard section headings make it easier for ATS to properly identify and parse the information. Don't combine sections for the same reason.

- No headers and footers. Most ATS can't pick up information in the document header or footer, so put your name and contact information in the actual body of your document.

- No graphics, pictures, symbols or special characters. While they may not jam up the ATS upload like they used to, images don't get read as data.

- No page borders, shapes or text boxes. You can use shading and outlines to highlight important information.

You can use advanced formatting features on the hard copy resume you bring to an interview but use a version with simpler formatting for online applications and resumes sent via email.