



## Getting Compatible with Applicant Tracking Systems

Presented by Paul Cameron, Founder of SpeedUpMyJobSearch.com  
& President of DriveStaff, Inc., an IT Recruiting firm in Wheaton, IL

ATS compatibility is about resume formatting, **NOT** keywords. To match resume keywords to jobs, we recommend [jobscan.co](http://jobscan.co) and [theprofessional.me](http://theprofessional.me). Applicant Tracking Systems provide employers with an easier way to keep track of and *contact* the candidates who apply to their jobs. Instead of forcing them to open every document to search for names, numbers, email addresses, and physical addresses, the ATS will “parse” that information into fields.

To do this, these systems scan for identifying traits such as an “@” symbol with text immediately surrounding it, which means it’s likely an email address. 9 digits near the top of a resume is likely a phone number. Once found, it will copy the information into the appropriate field in the system.

From there, the recruiter can pull up a list of names, click a button to dial the phone, and another to send a template email, all thanks to the magic of parsing! However, if the ATS cannot read your information due to your formatting, then those fields are left blank and all those convenient features become useless.

Due to the volume of resumes coming in and the cost of storing those unknown records, many ATS will keep their database “clean” by deleting all the blank records. Not only will this make it impossible for the employer to call you, but if you are submitting an Application Log to the Unemployment Office and they audit your applications, the employers will not be able to verify that you applied which could interfere with your unemployment benefits!

In short, without proper formatting, there are no keywords! [SpeedUpMyJobSearch.com/ATStest](http://SpeedUpMyJobSearch.com/ATStest) can perform true compatibility tests on two ATS that are currently being used daily at our recruiting firm, DriveStaff, Inc.

In addition to the two Applicant Tracking System seat licenses we hold, we also work with numerous corporate clients who require us to submit our candidate resumes through their corporate ATS. We see first-hand how those systems parse and display resumes and have learned how to ensure our resumes get through. The systems I’m referring to that our clients use include Taleo, IQNavigator, and SAP’s SuccessFactors, to name a few.

---

### Common Incompatibility Issues

---

#### Headers, Textboxes, Tables, & Images:

Placing your information into any type of box or image effectively puts a fence around your information that many ATS cannot jump over. The technology is getting better and many can get through now, but larger corporations often do not upgrade their ATS unless they must; it’s just not a top priority, so they continue using old systems.

#### Section Labels:

ATS use section labels to know when to look for what. By using obscure titles such as “My Journey” instead of “Professional Experience” will cause the ATS to skip the section to speed up the search process. Since virtually all ATS look for common terminology it’s essential we utilize terms that will be commonly recognized.

#### Containers

In Microsoft Word, when you hover your mouse over a title or section heading, you may see a small black triangle appear to the left of your information. If you click on that, you’ll see the entire section disappear! Containers are a great tool, but if an ATS or a college intern accidentally triggers a container to collapse while processing your resume, they could miss the experience they needed to see for that job. Be sure to remove all containers.

---

### Less-Common Incompatibility Issues

---

#### Horizontal Contact Information Lines:

Many resume writers will place contact information on a long horizontal line. While that does save space, our testing has shown that over 20% of the time the contact information, specifically the email address, will not parse correctly. Most commonly the dot before the com gets lost, e.g. email@gmailcom, and emails are undeliverable.

**Your Name in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS:**

There are two potential issues that occur when your name is in all caps, especially with initials after your name. The easiest trigger for an ATS to recognize a proper name is two words in succession that each start with a capital letter. When they are in all caps, the ATS must guess that's the name. If you have initials too, then this can happen:

Resume name: "JOHN SMITH, PMP"

Contact Information	
First Name	PMP
Middle Name	SMITH
Last Name	JOHN

Resume name: "JOHN SMITH PMP"

Contact Information	
First Name	JOHN
Middle Name	SMITH
Last Name	PMP

The second concern is the recruiter delays. Recruiters and HR professionals often use email templates. We have prewritten emails for meeting confirmations, rejections, requests for more information, and just about any email we need to send. These are set up in mail merge formats, meaning, they pull your first name from the ATS field so it won't say "to whom it may concern", it will say, "Hi John," which feels much more personal.

Recruiters and HR professionals are trained to look for minor issues on resumes and in correspondence that really aren't a big deal, but they show attention to detail. In other words, we make a living being OCD about mistakes! ☺ The thought of sending an email that shouts your name, "Hi JOHN," makes us cringe! To prevent that, we would need to open your record in edit mode, find your name, and fix it to proper case before sending you a reply. Many of us (including me) hesitate until they have time to go fix it. This may seem minor, but when we have hundreds of resumes to consider, there's no point in giving us a reason to delay reaching out to you.

**Kerning & Tracking:**

In typography, Kerning is the process of adjusting the spacing between characters in a proportional font. Tracking adjusts spacing uniformly over a range of characters. In a well-kerned font, the two-dimensional blank spaces between each pair of characters all have a visually similar area. Fonts are designed and redesigned with kerning and tracking in mind, and the ATS are designed to read them in their native state. Changing this preset data might allow more room on the page, but it makes the text more difficult for the ATS and has caused issues on our ATS.

**Font Styles & Choices:**

Using dramatic fonts have caused incompatibility in both of our ATS, and it has been cited by a trusted expert that fonts with serifs of any kind can cause issues. Additionally, it has been cited that font sizes smaller than 11pts cause issues also. Serif examples are circled. →



Despite conflicting reports from experts whom we know personally and trust to be honest and well-meaning, we strongly recommend using a sans serif font (meaning without serifs), like Arial or Calibri.

**Here's why:**

If I were to visit someone's house where one person who lives there tells me not to walk in the backyard because **they know** that someone buried a landmine out there, but then a second person who also lives there says not to worry about it because **they know** that's not true, well, ummm, I'm **NOT** going to walk around in their backyard! Ever! The enjoyment of walking around in someone's backyard doesn't come anywhere close to the potential consequences of the second person being wrong. Likewise, the satisfaction of using your favorite font style or size doesn't come anywhere close to the potential consequences of having your application for a great job getting blown up by an ATS compatibility issue. Thus, we recommend you double check **all** your text is a minimum of 11pts and is written in a sans serif font. And if an "expert" ever tells you not to worry about it, that there are no landmines attached to styles and fonts, enter at your own risk.