Creating an ATS-Friendly Résumé
Compliments of:
The Professional Association of Résumé Writers and Career Coaches January 2014 Newsletter; various
Employment Specialists and trainings from Career Thought Leaders

Reformatting a résumé to be ATS-compliant is more a matter of subtraction than addition. Using the list below, it's simply a matter of removing any potential hazards.

1. Stick with Word 97-2003 (.doc). Many ATSs cannot read .docx, PDF, or RTF formats. Do not use templates.
2. Eliminate all headers/footers and tables, single column only.
3. Eliminate page borders and section lines/shading. The only time a line can be used is under the address at the top of page 1, and it should only be a single line.
4. Be sure to incorporate keywords into job descriptions, not just in a Skills or Core Competencies section.
5. Do not use special characters (foreign letters, symbols) or accented letters. (Common symbols, such as dollar signs ($), percent signs (%), and pound signs (#) are okay. General rule – if it is found above the numbers on the keys at the top of the keyboard, it should be safe.) This also holds true for your name.
6. Never use text boxes, tables, section headings, page breaks, or columns. Rather than separate pages, make the résumé one long document.
7. Place degree or certification abbreviations on a separate line below the Name on the top of page 1, rather than after the name.
8. Stick with very simple, standard fonts: Arial, Tahoma, Calibri, Verdana, Times Roman, Courier, Georgia, Impact, Lucinda, Palatino, Sans Serif, Tahoma.
9. Do not include extra spaces between letters.
10. Do not use small caps. Only standard capitalization or all caps. Use ALL CAPS for all section headings.
11. Be sure to include the exact title you are applying for at the beginning of the résumé in some manner.
12. Always list dates for employment and education to the RIGHT of the company/school name; including months.
13. Keep margins at 1" all the way around.
14. Stay with one font size (11 or 12) and type throughout the résumé.
15. Do not underline or use italics. Bold is acceptable.
16. Use simple bullet points rather than arrows or other symbols, and check the bullet ahead of time to make sure it is readable. This is done by saving the document in .txt format or pasting it into an email and then sending the email to yourself. If the bullets retains their shape, it is okay. If it turns into a series of symbols, use a different bullet style.
17. Use only smart quotes (") rather than curly quotes (book quotes).
18. Stick with simple section headings. SUMMARY. PROFILE. SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS. PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE. EMPLOYMENT HISTORY. EDUCATION. TRAINING. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION. These common headings are all acceptable; creative/descriptive headings, such as CAREER HIGHLIGHTS, KEYS TO OPERATIONAL SUCCESS, DRIVING IMPROVEMENT, etc., will confuse an ATS. Also, do not combine sections, such as EDUCATION/TRAINING. Even some that we think of as common, such as VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE, can wreak havoc in an ATS. Anything not easily placed in one of the four or five standard sections should be a subcategory under ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.
19. Length. This is not as important as with an "in-person" résumé. You can go to 3 pages if need be. from being delivered by an ATS to the person who is doing the search.

If you wish to include a context statement describing the organization you worked with, do include that after the organization name, your title and employment dates