BEFORE YOU APPLY

The ATS-Friendly Resume/CV Checklist

Use these checks to help hiring software read your resume/CV cleanly — and to make the file easier for a recruiter to scan. A cleaner parse helps with screening. It does not guarantee an interview or a job. Different employers use different systems, so treat this as a practical pre-send list, not a promise.

01 File and format

- ☐ **Export as PDF or DOCX.** Those are the file types most application portals and checkers accept. If you still have an older .doc file, save it as DOCX or PDF first.
- ☐ **Confirm the text is selectable.** Open the file and try to highlight a sentence. If you cannot, the page may be a scan or an image, and many parsers will miss the words.
- ☐ **Use a common, readable font** at about 10–12 pt for body text (for example Arial, Calibri, Georgia, or another standard system font). Unusual display fonts can be harder to read and may not embed correctly.
- ☐ **Give the file a plain, professional name,** such as Firstname-Lastname-Resume.pdf. Avoid special characters and messy export names.
- ☐ **Do not password-protect or encrypt the file.** If the portal lists a maximum size, stay under it. A text-based PDF or DOCX is usually well under typical limits.

02 Layout risks

These are the design choices that most often scramble or hide text when a file is parsed. You do not need a plain document — you need a document whose words still exist as text, in a sensible order.

- ☐ **Prefer a single-column layout.** Multi-column designs can be read out of order by many parsers, so dates, skills, or whole sections may land in the wrong place.
- ☐ **Avoid tables for the main layout.** Some systems extract table cells in an unexpected order, or drop content altogether.
- ☐ **Do not put important text in text boxes, shapes, or floating objects.** That text is sometimes skipped.
- ☐ **Keep your name and contact details in the main body,** not only in the header or footer. Some systems ignore header and footer text.
- ☐ **Do not rely on images, logos, or a headshot to carry information.** Parsers typically do not read text that lives inside an image.
- ☐ **Write skills as words, not as icons, bars, or infographics.** If a skill matters, include it as text — for example in a Skills section.
- ☐ **Use a light background, dark body text, and simple bullets** (▪ or -). Low-contrast or text-over-image designs are hard to read, and unusual symbols can appear as garbled characters after a parse.

03 Sections and headings

- [ ] **Use clear, standard headings** such as Experience (or Work Experience), Education, and Skills. A Summary is fine if you use one.
- [ ] **Skip creative titles** like “Where I’ve Been” or “My Superpowers.” They can look fine to a person and be hard for software to map to the right fields.
- [ ] **Put sections in a logical order:** name and contact first, then an optional summary, experience, education, skills, and extras such as certifications or projects.
- [ ] **Keep dates, job titles, and employer names as plain text** on the page, next to the role they belong to — not only inside a graphic or a timeline.
- [ ] **Include only sections you can support.** Empty or placeholder headings do not help a parser or a recruiter.

04 Contact info

- [ ] **Put your full name at the top of the main body,** as selectable text — not as a logo or an image of your name.
- [ ] **Include a professional email address and a phone number** in the body of the first page, where a parser and a recruiter can both find them.
- [ ] **Add a city and state, or a city and country.** That is usually enough for location screening. You can leave off a full street address if you prefer not to share it.
- [ ] **If you include a LinkedIn or portfolio URL, write it as plain text** (or a standard hyperlink), not only as an icon.
- [ ] **Do not place contact details only in a header, footer, or sidebar graphic.** Put a complete set in the body of the first page.

05 Keywords and tailoring to the job post

A clean file is only half the work. The words still need to match a real job you can honestly do. Do not invent skills, tools, or titles to chase a match score.

- [ ] **Start from one real job post** you want to apply to, and read the requirements carefully.
- [ ] **Mirror language you can honestly support** — job titles, skills, tools, and qualifications that appear in the posting and in your experience.
- [ ] **Spell out acronyms at least once** if both forms are used in the posting or in your field — for example, “Customer Relationship Management (CRM).”
- [ ] **Put important skills in a Skills section** and, where it is true, in the bullets for the jobs where you used them.
- [ ] **If the posting asks for a specific certification, degree, or tool, include it only if you actually have it.**

06 Achievements

- [ ] **Lead bullets with what you did and what changed,** not only a list of duties or a job description copied from the role.
- [ ] **Add a number, scope, or result where you can** — a percentage, a dollar amount, a team size, a volume of work, or time saved. If you do not have a precise figure, describe the scope honestly instead of inventing one.
- [ ] **Start bullets with a clear verb** and keep them concise. Cut filler such as “responsible for” or “helped with” when you can say the work more directly.
- [ ] **Place the most relevant achievements for this job near the top of each role,** and on the first page when they truly belong there.

07 Final pre-send check

- [ ] **Open the final PDF or DOCX and confirm you can select and copy the text.**
- [ ] **Skim the first page as a hiring manager might.** Your name, contact details, most recent role, and key skills should be obvious in a few seconds.
- [ ] **Check spelling, dates, and consistent punctuation.** Mismatched dates are a trust issue for a human reader as much as a parse issue.
- [ ] **Remove track changes, comments, placeholder text,** and any hidden personal details you do not want to share.
- [ ] **Re-read the job post once more** and confirm this version speaks to that role, not a generic file you send everywhere.
- [ ] **If the resume/CV runs long, make sure page one still carries the essentials** — name, contact, and the experience that matters most for this job. There is no single required length that fits every role.
- [ ] **Run a free check on the file,** then export a clean PDF or Word copy if you still need to fix layout issues.

How to check yours

Upload your resume/CV to the free CVBase ATS checker. No account is required. You will get a score and the top issues to fix. Paste a job description if you want a keyword match. A higher score means hiring software can read your file more cleanly. It does not guarantee an interview.

cvbase.ai/ats-checker?utm_source=checklist_pdf&utm_medium=lead_magnet&utm_campaign=ats_checklist

Build on a clean template, free

If layout issues keep showing up, start in the free CVBase builder. Every plan includes all 75 templates, no watermark, and PDF and Word export. These five ATS-category templates are a solid place to start — they are already on the templates page, and they are not an exclusive pack:

Classic ATS · Clean ATS · Simple ATS · Standard ATS · Minimalist ATS

cvbase.ai/builder · cvbase.ai/templates

This checklist covers common format, structure, and tailoring issues. It cannot promise that a given employer’s software will parse your file perfectly, or that your application will be seen. When you are ready, check the file, then send it.