ATS-Friendly Resume Formatting

by SuperLede via cheatography.com/219377/cs/48581/

About these notes

Numbers come from tests by ReadableResume (I run it): one sample resume with 46 fields, built in Google Docs, downloaded as a PDF and read by OpenResume, an open-source resume parser. 10 layouts and 32 fonts were tested, changing one thing at a time.

It's one parser. Workday, Greenhouse, iCIMS and other hiring systems may behave differently, and a misread field is not the same as a rejection.

Layout

One column	46/46 fields read
Photo next to the name	46/46
Icons in the contact line	46/46
Skill rating bars	46/46
Contact details in the page header	46/46 from the Google Docs PDF
Two columns (table or Format > Columns)	42/46. Lines that wrapped in the narrow column were cut or misread
Name and contact in a text box	34/46. Exported as a picture

Photos and skill bars didn't lower the score in this test. Check they leave room for dates and degree titles to stay on one line.

Fonts that parsed cleanly

9 of 32 fonts kept every character and read 46/46 after a Google Docs PDF export:

Arial · Book Antiqua · Calibri · Cambria · EB Garamond · Garamond · Georgia · Times New Roman · Trebuchet MS

Fonts to watch

Letter pairs (ligatures)	16 fonts, including Roboto, Lato and Open Sans, stored pairs such as "fi" and "fl" as one character
Lost spaces	In 15 of those, the parser dropped the space before the word: `checks first` → `checks first`
Aptos	Google Docs drew it in Arial. The company name was read onto the date line (36/46)
Helvetica	Google Docs drew it in Helvetica Neue
Inter	Brackets and hyphen in the phone number saved as private-use characters; phone field empty
Tahoma, Roboto Slab	Company name read onto the date line
Courier New	Words run together, 10/46
Page length	15 fonts pushed the one-page sample onto two pages at the same sizes

Sizes

Body text	10.5–11 pt
Section headings	11–12 pt, bold
Your name	18–22 pt, bold
Never below 10 pt	Cut a line instead

One font for the whole page. Use size and bold for hierarchy.

Text boxes

Google Docs exported the text box as a **picture**. The words were visible but not in the PDF's text.

The parser found no name, email, phone or links, and took the heading `EDUCATION` as the name.

The .docx download of the same document still held the text, inside the text box.

Fix: move contact details into the body of the document.

Dates

Dates in a wide table column	46/46
Same column, too narrow	Dates wrapped; the year on line 2 was read as the company (`2025`). 40/46
Rule of thumb	Keep each date range on one line
Short months (Jan, Aug)	OpenResume doesn't treat them as months, but the year carried the date and it still read correctly

By **SuperLede**
cheatography.com/superlede/

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Export from Google Docs

PDF	File > Download > PDF Document
Print to PDF	Turn off **Headers and footers** under More settings, or the date and doc URL get printed
Word	File > Download > Microsoft Word (.docx)
Don't	Convert a PDF to Word. Converters rebuild lines as text boxes and tables
Don't	Send a screenshot or image
Header contact in .docx	Fine in the PDF, but in the .docx the name and contact sit in the header part, outside the main body
File name	`Firstn ame -La stn ame -Re su m e.pdf`

Self-check before you apply

1. Open the PDF, select all, paste into a plain text editor.

2. Name, email and phone at the top? If not, look for a text box or image.

3. Each date range on one line?

4. Any words joined together, or bullets turned into boxes? Change the font.

5. Same page count as in Google Docs?

6. Run the PDF through a parser to see what an ATS parser reads from your resume. It runs OpenResume in the browser; the file isn't uploaded.

Parser limits worth knowing

Phone numbers: only US style, e.g. (555) 555-5555. +44 7700 900123 was not recognised.

Locations: expects "City, ST". "Manchester, England" was not recognised.

Links: only one is kept. A second link stays in the text, not the link field.

Headings: English section headings only.

Two pages: the last line of page 1 is joined to the first line of page 2. Harmless between bullets; breaks the entry between jobs.

Names: José Álvarez and Иван Петров read correctly; 王小明 left the name field empty.

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