



# HOW TO MAKE YOUR RESUME VISIBLE TO RECRUITERS

The Real ATS Playbook



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# INTRODUCTION

Most resumes don't fail because of a lack of experience.

They fail because of how they are processed and positioned within hiring systems.

Before a recruiter ever sees your application, it is handled by an Applicant Tracking System (ATS). If your resume is not aligned with how these systems store and retrieve information, it may not appear in a recruiter's search results.

This means opportunities can be missed before your experience is even considered.

This guide explains how that process works.

You'll learn how ATS systems handle your resume, how recruiters search for candidates, and why strong applicants are often overlooked. More importantly, you'll understand what changes can improve how your resume performs within these systems.

This is not about guaranteeing outcomes.

It's about improving positioning, clarity, and alignment—so your resume has a stronger chance of being considered.



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharmla Pillay is a seasoned Recruitment and Operations Specialist with over a decade of experience across South Africa and Australia.

She began her career in agency recruitment and has since worked across both agency and in-house environments, supporting and contributing to hiring processes from screening through to placement.

Over the course of her career, she has reviewed and assessed over 5,000–10,000 CVs, giving her a clear understanding of what gets candidates seen—and what gets them filtered out.

She has been directly involved in:

- Candidate shortlisting and hiring decisions
- Writing job specifications and aligning roles to business needs
- Managing and supporting end-to-end recruitment processes
- High-volume and time-critical hiring environments

During the COVID-19 response in Australia, she supported recruitment operations contributing to the rapid hiring and mobilisation of over 300 healthcare professionals for vaccine testing and large-scale clinic environments in Queensland.

In one high-pressure instance, she helped coordinate placements that resulted in 14 hires in a single afternoon, meeting critical healthcare needs at numerous covid testing sites.

Her experience spans working with founders, executives, and operational teams, giving her insight into how hiring decisions are made beyond what is written on a resume.

**Her core focus is simple:** Candidates don't get rejected because they lack experience. They get filtered out because their experience is not positioned correctly within modern hiring systems.

This guide is based on real-world recruitment experience—not theory.

## MISSION

Sharmla's mission is to help South Africans access better career opportunities—both locally and globally—by educating clients on modern hiring systems, highlighting career opportunities not yet realised, prepare clients for remote work readiness and help position and market their resumes effectively.

# **KEY CHALLENGES JOB SEEKERS ENCOUNTER**

- You're applying.
- You're qualified.
- You're getting no response.

**This is not random. It's  
structural.**

# WHAT ATS ACTUALLY DOES

An Applicant Tracking System is not a decision-maker.

It is a **database and search tool**.

Platforms like Workday, Greenhouse, and iCIMS are used to:

- Stores resume as structured data
- Index job titles, skills, and experience
- Allow recruiters to search using filters
- Track candidate progress

**Key truth:**

- Recruiters drive search logic
- ATS enables visibility based on how recruiters search

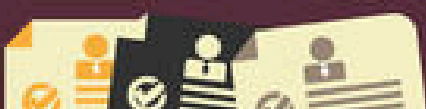
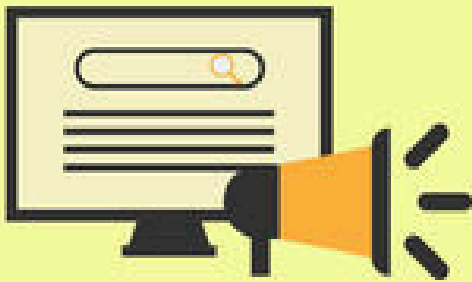


# HOW ATS WORKS



# HOW RECRUITERS ACTUALLY USE ATS

## Applicant Tracking System (ATS)



## Here's what really happens:

- Recruiters filter down to  $\pm 20$  candidates
- Scan each resume for 6–10 seconds
- Look for familiar titles and keywords
- Shortlist 5–10

## Your resume must:

- Appear in the ATS search
- Make sense instantly

# WHAT ACTUALLY MATTERS

## 1. Job Titles

If your title doesn't match the role, you won't appear.

Example:

Senior Educator →  
Senior Educator  
(Administration &  
Coordination)

## 2. Keywords (Exact match)

ATS does not infer meaning.

“Managed schedules” ≠  
“Diary management”

Use both.

## 3. Skills Section

Weak:

- Hardworking
- Passionate

Strong:

- Executive Support
- Diary Management
- Stakeholder  
Coordination

## 4. Structure

You must have:

- Clear job titles
- Company names
- Accurate dates

# WHAT THE ATS **DOES NOT** CARE ABOUT

In some instances ATS does not care about:

- Design
- Icons
- Colour
- Photos
- Pre-designed templates and fancy layouts
- Personal branding statements
- Columns
- Logos

In many cases, these may reduce visibility. If it looks designed, it may not be readable. Though some modern ATS platforms (especially newer ones) have improved their parsing of multi-column layouts.



# RESUME FORMATTING RULES (NON-NEGOTIABLE)

- One-column layout
- Standard fonts (Calibri, Arial)
- No tables or text boxes
- No graphics or icons
- Clear headings
- Simple bullet points

This is the safest approach for maximum compatibility across all systems.



# WHY YOU'RE NOT GETTING INTERVIEWS

Most candidates are rejected before being seen.

## Common reasons:

- Job titles don't match the role
- Resume is not aligned to the job description
- Skills are unclear or buried
- Experience is described, not positioned
- Resume is not searchable

**This is a positioning problem—not a qualification problem.**



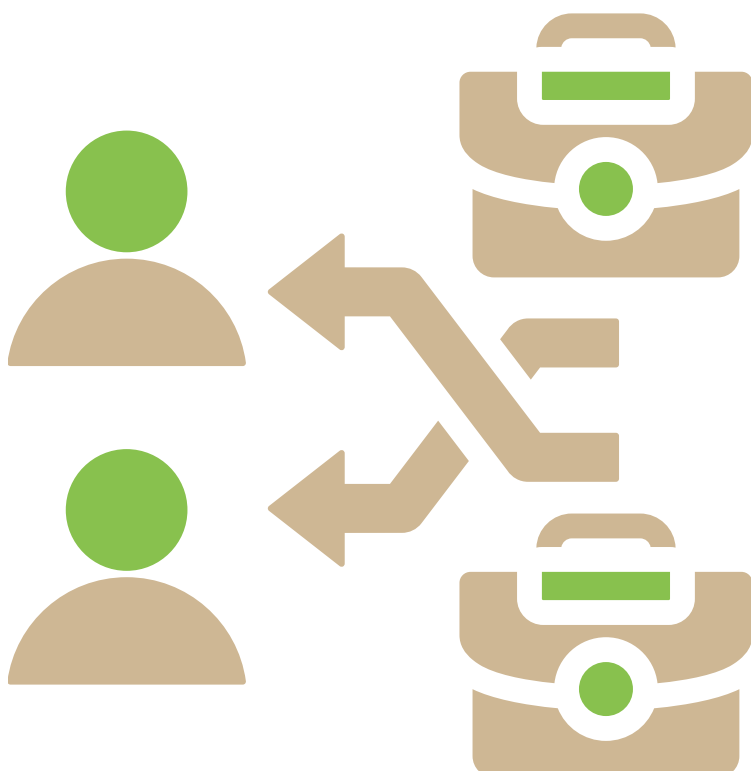
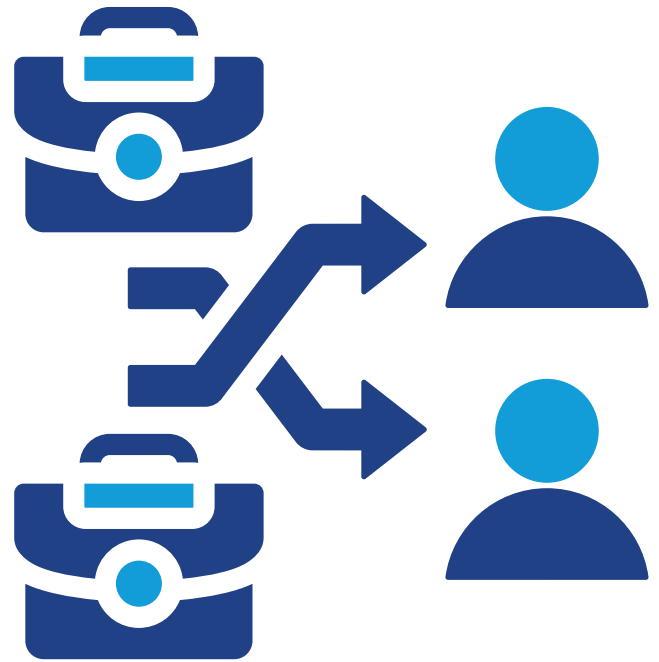
# CAREER TRANSITIONS & ATS

Career changes fail because:

- Titles don't match
- Language is industry-specific
- Skills are hidden

**Fix:**

- Translate experience into business functions
- Lead with transferable skills
- Align language with the role



Example:

**Before:**

“Responsible for teaching Grade 2”

**After:**

“Managed reporting, scheduling, and stakeholder communication for 120+ learners”

# THE 80/20 ATS STRATEGY

You don't need to rewrite your entire resume.

**Focus on:**

## 1. Use the job ad

**Extract:**

- Job title
- Skills
- Responsibilities

## 2. Align your resume

**Update:**

- Summary
- Skills
- Most recent role

## 3. Use repetition (naturally)

If the role is admin-heavy:

- admin
- administration
- administrative

Should appear more than once.



# ATS VS HUMAN DECISION

ATS = Visibility  
Recruiter = Decision

➤ You need both



# **SOUTH AFRICA VS GLOBAL ATS (ADVANCED INSIGHT)**



## **South Africa (Corporate):**

- More structured systems
- Strict job title matching
- Keyword-heavy filtering

## **Global / Remote Roles:**

- More flexible systems
- Context matters more
- Recruiter interpretation plays a bigger role

### **IMPORTANT NOTE**

**ONE CV DOES NOT FIT ALL MARKETS**

# SIMPLE ATS CHECKLIST

## Check before submitting your resume:

Does your job title align with the role?

Do your resume keywords match job the description?

Are your skills clear and relevant to the role?

Is your resume format simple and readable?

Did you include metrics where relevant?

Does your resume make sense in 6 seconds?

If you answered “no” to 2 or more - Your resume needs repositioning.

## NOTES

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# IMPROVE HOW YOUR RESUME PERFORMS IN TODAY'S HIRING PROCESS

If you're not getting interviews, your resume may not be aligned with how recruiters search and evaluate candidates.

The Resume Diagnostic Audit will help you understand:

- What may be limiting your visibility
- Where your resume is misaligned
- What can be improved

Book your review:

[info@nextchapterresumes.co.za](mailto:info@nextchapterresumes.co.za)

**Important Note:** This service is designed to improve how your resume is positioned and presented. It does not guarantee interviews or job placement.

## IMPORTANT TO NOTE PRIOR BOOKING

This is a specialist, paid service intended for professionals with 5+ years work experience. If you are early in your career, this service may not be the best fit at this stage.

# FAQ SHEET

**Will this guarantee me interviews or a job?**

No. This service improves how your resume is positioned and presented within modern hiring systems. Hiring outcomes depend on factors such as market conditions, competition, and employer requirements.

**What does the Resume Diagnostic Audit include?**

- Identification of what may be limiting your resume's performance
  - Recommendations aligned to ATS and recruiter behaviour
  - Clear guidance to improve positioning for your target roles
- This is a diagnostic and strategy-focused service, not basic editing.

**How is this different from a standard resume review?**

Our core focus is on:

- How recruiters search
- How ATS systems process your resume
- How your experience is positioned
- Based on real recruitment experience—not generic advice.

**Will this help if I already have a strong resume?**

Yes, in many cases. Strong candidates are often overlooked due to misalignment with hiring systems. This audit identifies gaps that are not always obvious.

**Can this help with career changes?**

Yes—with the right expectations. The focus is on translating your experience into language aligned with your target role.

**Who is this service for?**

This is a paid, specialist service designed for professionals with:

- 5+ years of experience
- Mid-level to senior roles only
- Not entry level job seekers.

**How long does the process take?**

Typically 2–4 working days. You will receive structured feedback with clear next steps.

**What do you need from me?**

- Your current resume
- Roles you are targeting
- Relevant job search context

**What results should I expect?**

- Improved resume positioning
- Better alignment with job requirements
- Clearer direction for your applications
- Results vary depending on experience, market demand, and execution.

**Why should I trust this process?**

This approach is based on:

- Reviewing 5,000–10,000 resumes
- Real recruitment and hiring experience
- Practical understanding of how candidates are searched and shortlisted

# ABOUT

## OVERVIEW

Many professionals struggle to secure interviews not because they lack experience, but because their resume does not clearly communicate their value to recruiters.

Modern hiring processes often involve:

- Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)
- Recruiter keyword searches
- Rapid resume screening

Our core focus is on repositioning your experience with clarity, aligning with the roles you're targeting and the way recruiters evaluate candidates.

## WHY CLIENTS WORK WITH ME

Clients come to Next Chapter Resumes because they want:

- Lived experience
- Honest, professional insight into their positioning
- A resume that reflects their actual level
- Strategic guidance rather than generic editing
- A clear path toward their next role

## THE PROCESS

Initial resume review  
Client intake questionnaire  
Resume engineering and repositioning  
Quality review and delivery  
Client feedback and one revision round

## WHO THIS SERVICE IS FOR

My service is intended for:

- Individuals who are serious about presenting their experience effectively in competitive hiring processes.
- Professionals with 5-20 years of experience
- Mid-senior managers or coordinators
- Specialists seeking better roles
- Career transitions

## IMPORTANT NOTE

Resume repositioning improves how your experience is presented to employers. Hiring decisions ultimately depend on factors such as market conditions, employer needs, and candidate experience.

This service does not guarantee job placement or interviews.