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INTRODUCTION

You check your phone again. Still no reply from that company you applied to last week. Or the one before that. Or the dozen before that.

If you're reading this, you've probably felt that particular kind of frustration - sending out resume after resume, meeting most of the requirements, and hearing nothing back. Not even a rejection. Just silence.

Here's what most job seekers never find out: that silence usually has nothing to do with whether you're good enough for the job. It has to do with whether your resume was ever actually read properly in the first place. Somewhere between clicking "Apply" and a recruiter forming an opinion about you, your resume is quietly filtered - by software, then by a few seconds of human attention - and most resumes lose at one of those two points without the candidate ever knowing why.

This matters more than it might seem. Every unanswered application isn't just a missed opportunity - it's information you're not getting about a problem you could actually fix if you knew where to look.

This book exists to close that gap. Not with vague advice about "standing out," but with 25 specific, checkable fixes - covering exactly how your resume is formatted, structured, written, tailored, and reviewed before you send it. By the end, you'll know precisely what to check, what to change, and what result to aim for, every time you apply.

This book is for Indian job seekers at any stage - freshers applying for their first role, professionals switching industries, and anyone who suspects their resume, not their ability, is holding them back. **It's not for anyone looking for** guaranteed interviews or income promises; no book can offer that, and this one won't pretend to. What it can do is make sure your resume never costs you an opportunity for an avoidable, fixable reason.

The chapters ahead move in a deliberate order: first understanding why resumes actually get rejected, then fixing how your resume looks and reads, then sharpening what it says about you, then making sure it matches the specific job in front of you, and finally, a complete audit to run before every single application. Read it once in order. After that, you'll return to it far more often as a reference than as a book.

Chapter 2

Cracking the ATS Code - How Indian Companies Filter Resumes Before a Human Sees Them

Remember the first gate from Chapter 1? This chapter is about that gate - the Applicant Tracking System, or ATS. It's the single biggest reason strong candidates never get a callback, and most job seekers have no idea it's even happening.

Here's the good news: once you understand what an ATS actually does, fixing it is mechanical, not creative. No rewriting your entire career story - just three specific fixes.

What an ATS Actually Does

An ATS is software companies use to manage incoming applications. When you submit a resume, it doesn't get read by a person first - it gets **parsed**.

Parsing means the software breaks your resume into pieces: name, contact details, education, work experience, skills. It tries to slot each piece of text into the right field, based on how your resume is structured and labelled.

Once parsed, many ATS tools also **rank** resumes - scoring them by how well the extracted text matches keywords from the job description. Higher-ranked resumes are more likely to actually reach a recruiter's screen. This is different from matching your resume's content to a specific job (that's Chapter 6) - right now, we're only concerned with whether

the ATS can read your resume accurately at all. A perfectly relevant resume still fails if the software can't extract the words in the first place.

Here's the catch: if the ATS can't parse your resume correctly, it doesn't matter how strong your experience is. Your information either gets dropped, jumbled, or filed under the wrong field - and a jumbled resume ranks poorly, if it gets ranked at all.

Rohit's story shows this clearly. A mechanical engineer from Coimbatore, Rohit built a sleek two-column resume with a photo and a visual "skills graph" showing bars for each skill. It looked polished in Word. But when an ATS parsed it, the two columns got read out of order, mixing his education dates with his job titles. The skills graph - just an image - wasn't read as text at all. Nearly half his content effectively vanished before any recruiter saw it. Rohit had strong, relevant experience in CAD design and quality control - none of it was the problem. The design of the document was.

This is exactly why Chapter 1 called Format one of the four rejection buckets. Let's fix it.

Fix #1: Choose the Right File Format

Most Indian job portals and company career pages accept either **.docx (Word)** or **.pdf**. Which one to use depends on how you're submitting:

- **Uploading directly to a portal (Naukri, LinkedIn Easy Apply, company ATS forms):**
Use .docx unless the portal specifies otherwise. Older

and some regional ATS tools parse Word files more reliably than PDFs.

- **Emailing your resume directly to a recruiter or HR contact:** Use PDF. It preserves formatting exactly as you see it and won't shift on a different device.
- **Applying through a company's own careers page:** These systems often specify a format explicitly on the upload screen - follow it exactly, even if it differs from your usual default.
- **When in doubt:** Check the job posting for a stated preference. If none is given, .docx is the safer default for portal uploads.

Never send resumes as image files (JPEG, PNG) or scanned copies. An ATS cannot extract text from an image at all - it's an instant rejection at the parsing stage.

Quick win: After saving your resume, open it in a plain text editor (like Notepad) or select-all and paste it into a blank document. If the content comes out readable and in the right order, that's a rough sign your ATS parsing will work too. If it comes out jumbled or missing sections, so will the ATS's version.

Fix #2: Strip Out What ATS Tools Can't Read

This is where Rohit's resume went wrong, and it's the most common Format mistake. Avoid the following in your main resume content:

Avoid	Why It Breaks Parsing
Multi-column layouts	Text often gets read in the wrong order, or columns overlap
Tables for job details	Content inside table cells may be skipped or scrambled
Text boxes	Frequently ignored completely by ATS parsers
Headers and footers	Contact details placed here are often not read at all
Icons, graphs, and skill-bar visuals	Treated as images - no text is extracted
Unusual fonts or symbols as bullets	Can render as broken characters or blank spaces

The safer approach: a **single-column layout**, plain text, standard bullet points (• or -), and no design elements doing the job that words should. It may look less "designed," but it's built to actually be read - by software and human alike.

Fix #3: Use Section Headings ATS Software Recognizes

ATS tools are trained to look for specific, standard section names. Creative headings might look appealing, but they often confuse the parser.

Use This	Not This
Work Experience	My Journey
Education	Academic Background
Skills	What I Bring
Certifications	Extra Credentials
Projects	Things I've Built

Stick to the conventional label even if it feels less original. This isn't the place to showcase creativity - save that for how you describe your achievements, which Chapter 5 covers.

A Note on ATS Tools in India

Different companies use different ATS platforms - some use global tools, others build in-house systems, and job portals like Naukri run their own resume-matching logic. Specific vendor names shift over time as companies switch providers, so they're not worth memorizing. You won't always know which system a company uses, and you don't need to. The formatting principles above work across virtually all of them, because they all rely on the same basic task: extracting clean, structured text.

It's tempting to think a more "designed" resume will stand out. In reality, for the ATS stage, the opposite is true - the plainer and more predictable your structure, the more reliably your actual content gets through. Save the visual polish for how you present your achievements in the sections that follow, not for the layout itself.

Your 10-Point ATS-Safe Formatting Checklist

Run through this before saving any resume version:

1. Saved as .docx (for portal uploads) or PDF (for direct email)?
2. No image, scanned copy, or unusual file type used?
3. Single-column layout throughout?
4. No tables used to organize job details or dates?
5. No text boxes anywhere in the document?
6. Contact details placed in the main body, not the header or footer?
7. No icons, graphs, or visual skill bars replacing text?
8. Standard bullet characters used (• or -)?
9. Section headings use conventional labels (Work Experience, Education, Skills)?
10. Fonts are standard and consistent (no decorative or symbol fonts)?

If you answered "yes" to all ten, your resume is now built to survive the first gate.

The next chapter tackles what happens once a human actually opens it - the length, order, and layout choices that keep a recruiter reading instead of scrolling past.

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