CV Tips

Article 1

The ATS checklist every CV in 2026 should pass

The 11 things an ATS looks for before a human ever sees your CV — and how to bake them in without killing the design.

More than 90% of Fortune 500 companies and a growing share of mid-market employers route every job application through an Applicant Tracking System (ATS) before a recruiter lays eyes on it. The ATS parses your CV into structured data, matches it against the job description, and decides whether you're worth a human minute. Get one thing wrong — a column layout, a PDF exported from an illustration tool, a photo where your email should be — and you disappear.

Good news: making your CV ATS-friendly doesn't mean making it ugly. The most ATS-safe CVs in the world are also the cleanest, most readable ones. Here's the full checklist, in the order of highest impact.

1. Use a single-column layout

This is the number one killer. ATS parsers read left-to-right, top-to-bottom. When you put your contact info in a sidebar and experience in the main column, many older systems will read your name, then your first job, then jump back up to your phone number, then down to your second job — producing a word soup that the keyword matcher can't salvage.

Rule

One column. Contact info at the very top in a single line. Experience, skills, and education stack vertically below.

2. Stick to standard section names

The parser expects labels like "Experience", "Education", "Skills". Creative variants like "Where I've Made Impact" or "My Arsenal" will get dropped into an "Other" bucket the recruiter will never search. You can be creative in your bullets; save the wordplay for there.

3. Mirror keywords — don't stuff them

Open the job description and highlight every concrete noun: tools, methodologies, metrics, job titles. If the JD says "Jira", your CV shouldn't say "Atlassian ticketing". If they want "Python", don't write "scripting". The matching is literal.

That said, keyword stuffing (copy-pasting a block of skills into a hidden white-text footer, or sprinkling the same term 20 times) is detectable. Modern ATSes weight relevance by context. Use each keyword once in the Skills section, plus once in the context of a real accomplishment.

Good

Shipped a lead-scoring service in Python (scikit-learn) that cut SDR triage time from 45min to 4min per account.

Bad

Skills: Python, Python 3, Python programming, Python (advanced), Python 3.11, Python developer.

4. Quantify at least half your bullets

Numbers help both the ATS (which boosts you for concrete metrics) and the human (who scans them first). If you don't have a precise number, give a range. If you don't have a range, give a comparison.

- Precise: "Grew weekly active users from 12k to 47k in 7 months."
- Range: "Cut customer onboarding time by 30–40% across 3 markets."
- Comparison: "Led the first paid acquisition channel that beat organic CAC."

5. Consistent date format

Use one format and one format only: Month YYYY – Month YYYY (e.g. Mar 2022 – Oct 2024). Mixed formats (2022, March '22, Spring 22) confuse parsers and signal carelessness. Use "Present" for current roles, never blank.

6. Save as PDF — the right kind

Export from a text-based source (Google Docs, Word, a real CV tool), not by screenshotting a Figma or Canva design and embedding the image. If an ATS can't copy-paste text out of your CV, you are a picture to it — and pictures score zero.

Quick test

Open your PDF, try to select and copy the body. If you get clean text, you're safe. If you get nothing (or garbled characters), re-export from a text source.

7. Use plain text for contact info

Your name, email, and phone number at the top should be text — not inside a graphic header. I've seen candidates lose half their applications because their beautiful designer-CV header was a single rasterized image.

8. Name your file clearly

First_Last_Role.pdf is the standard. The hiring team indexes filenames; they'll thank you when searching for you later. Never submit "resume_v47_final_FINAL_JULY.pdf".

9. Lead every bullet with a strong verb

The first word the parser (and the human) sees per bullet does most of the work. Start with action: led, built, launched, reduced, grew, partnered, mentored. Never start with "Responsible for" — it's invisible.

10. Skip the photo (in most markets)

In the US, UK, Canada, and Australia, photos on CVs invite unconscious-bias lawsuits and many ATS configurations strip them automatically. In parts of Europe and Asia, photos are still expected. Know your market.

11. The 90-second human test

Once the ATS hands you off, a human spends about 90 seconds on the first read. Your top third should tell them: what role you want, what caliber you operate at, and your top two accomplishments. Everything else is confirmation.

The pre-submit checklist

1. Single column, standard sections, plain-text contact row.
2. File named First_Last_Role.pdf, exported from a text source.
3. Top 10 JD keywords present at least once, in real context.
4. ≥50% of bullets have a number.
5. All dates in Month YYYY format, no gaps.
6. Action verb at the start of every bullet.
7. Photo and logos removed (in Western markets).
8. Copy-paste test passes — text selectable, no garbled characters.

Run this before every submission. It takes 3 minutes and routinely lifts callback rates by 30–50% for candidates whose CVs were otherwise being filtered out for technical reasons.

Article 2

How to write CV bullets that actually land interviews

Stop describing duties. Start landing offers. The formula, the verbs, and 10 before/afters behind every great bullet on a staff-level CV.

Most CV bullets describe what someone was responsible for. Great CV bullets describe what someone changed. The difference between a CV that gets a callback and one that gets deleted almost always comes down to the bullets — not the design, not the font, not the length.

In this piece we'll go through the formula behind strong bullets, the action verbs that actually land, how to quantify when you don't have clean numbers, and ten before/after rewrites across common roles so you can rewrite your own CV in an hour.

Duties vs. outcomes — the shift

The weakest bullets describe duties (what you were assigned to do). The strongest describe outcomes (what the company now has that it didn't before).

Weak — duty

Responsible for onboarding new enterprise customers.

Strong — outcome

Rebuilt enterprise onboarding playbook; lifted time-to-first-value from 21 to 9 days and cut churn by 14% in-year.

Same job, same person. The second version earns the callback because it tells the hiring manager exactly what a comparable outcome at their company would look like.

The formula

Every strong bullet fits this shape:

[Action verb] + [What you did] + [Measurable result or meaningful consequence]

Lead with an action verb. Say specifically what you did (concrete nouns). End with the result, ideally quantified.

Action verbs that pull their weight

These verbs do work because they imply ownership and force you to describe outcomes:

- Led, drove, owned, built, shipped, launched
- Grew, doubled, tripled, scaled, accelerated
- Reduced, cut, eliminated, saved, consolidated
- Designed, architected, re-platformed, migrated
- Mentored, hired, promoted, ran a team of

Words that quietly kill your CV

- Responsible for (invisible — implies nothing about outcome)
- Helped with, assisted, participated in (minimizes your role)
- Worked on, was part of (same)
- Various, multiple, diverse (imprecise filler)
- Passionate about, driven to (tell-don't-show)

Quantify — even when you don't have clean numbers

The #1 pushback I hear from coaching candidates: "I don't have metrics." Almost everyone does — they're just not looking in the right places. Here's a ladder you can use from most to least precise:

1. Hard number: "Grew ARR from $2.1M to $8.4M in 18 months."
2. Percentage change: "Reduced support ticket volume by 32% over two quarters."
3. Range: "Shipped 3–5 new features per quarter across 2 years."
4. Comparison: "First team to hit the company's weekly NPS target."
5. Scope: "Owned roadmap for a product used by 280+ enterprise customers."
6. Team size: "Mentored 4 engineers, 2 promoted to Senior during my tenure."

Find hidden numbers

Look at: team size, number of customers, volume of tickets/requests, launch cadence, dollar value of deals, scope of migration, user count, before/after survey scores, revenue impact, time saved per task × frequency.

The STAR bullet method

STAR — Situation, Task, Action, Result — is a great structure for interview stories. For CV bullets, you want a compressed version: just the Action and Result, with enough Situation context to make the outcome meaningful.

Compressed STAR

After a major outage (situation), led the cross-team incident review process (action) and reduced repeat-cause incidents by 70% over the following six months (result).

10 before/afters

Product manager

Before

Responsible for the onboarding flow and improving retention.

After

Rebuilt onboarding flow around a 3-step activation loop; day-1 activation 34% → 58% in 6 weeks, day-30 retention +11pp.

Software engineer

Before

Worked on migrating the backend from Python to Go.

After

Led migration of pricing service from Python to Go; cut p99 latency 420ms → 60ms, halved infrastructure cost at peak load.

Designer

Before

Designed new checkout screens and worked with engineers on implementation.

After

Redesigned checkout flow; A/B test lifted mobile conversion 8.3% and unlocked $1.1M/qtr. Open-sourced design-tokens kit now used across 4 teams.

Marketing manager

Before

Managed multiple paid campaigns and reported on results.

After

Ran $2.4M paid-acquisition budget across Meta, Google, and TikTok; drove CAC from $87 → $42 while tripling monthly signup volume.

Customer success

Before

Handled a book of business of enterprise customers.

After

Owned a $4.8M ARR enterprise book (18 accounts); delivered 114% net retention across two fiscal years and spun up a new QBR framework now used org-wide.

Data analyst

Before

Built dashboards for various stakeholders.

After

Built self-serve growth dashboard used daily by 40+ stakeholders; replaced 6 weekly manual reports and freed ~12 analyst hours/week.

Sales

Before

Exceeded quota in 2023.

After

Finished FY23 at 147% of quota ($2.8M, #2 AE company-wide); closed our first $500k+ logo and set the team's playbook for the Series C motion.

Manager

Before

Managed a team of engineers.

After

Led a team of 7 engineers across two time zones; promoted 3, retained 100% through a competitive hiring year, and shipped 4 P1 initiatives on-time.

Recent grad

Before

Intern project analyzing user data.

After

Built attribution model for the mobile growth team as part of 12-week internship; recommendation adopted and now drives $180k/month in reallocated spend.

Career pivoter

Before

Transitioned into product management.

After

Pivoted from ops into product after leading the 0→1 partner-onboarding workflow; now shipped 3 features end-to-end and own the internal-tools roadmap.

Your 30-minute CV audit

1. Underline every verb. Replace weak ones.
2. Circle every number. If less than half your bullets have one, add numbers wherever possible.
3. Count the words per bullet. Aim for 15–25 — longer is usually waffle.
4. Ask: "Could a peer in a similar role have written this exact bullet?" If yes, make it more specific.
5. For each role, keep 3–5 bullets. Prune the weakest one.

Do this across two or three roles and you'll have a CV that makes hiring managers stop scrolling. No redesign needed.

Article 3

Rewrite your LinkedIn bio in 10 minutes

A 4-line template recruiters can scan in 5 seconds — and that actually reflects the senior version of you. Plus headline, photo, and custom URL.

Your LinkedIn About section isn't your CV in prose. It's a hook. Done right, it takes 10 minutes to rewrite, gets read in under 30 seconds, and pulls 3× more recruiter messages. Done wrong, it's invisible at best and actively repelling at worst.

Most senior professionals' About sections read like a weak annual performance review. Long paragraphs, "passionate about" clichés, and a kitchen-sink list of skills. We'll fix all of that here.

What the About section is actually for

Recruiters don't read LinkedIn the way you read a book. They scan. A recruiter pulling up your profile for the first time spends about 8–12 seconds on the top third — headline, photo, headline, About first 2 lines — before deciding whether to scroll.

The About section's job is simple: convince that recruiter that scrolling is worth it.

The 4-line template

Structure

Line 1: What you do, at what caliber. Line 2: The proof. Line 3: What you believe or care about. Line 4: How to reach you.

Four lines. Each one stands alone. Whitespace between them. This layout is deliberately easy to scan on mobile.

Line 1 — What you do, at what caliber

State your job in plain English. Not your title — your job.

Examples

I help early-stage SaaS teams ship product faster. / I design financial systems that banks actually want to use. / I build ML infrastructure for companies scaling past their first 10M requests/day.

Line 2 — The proof

One sentence that makes your caliber concrete. Scale, scope, results.

Examples

Led product at 2 Series A → C companies, shipped to 6M users. / 12 years across fintech and healthtech; most recently head of design at [Company]. / Previously built search infra at [Company A]; now open to new challenges.

Line 3 — What you believe

One short belief that reflects how you work. Not a manifesto. One sentence.

Examples

I believe great product comes from clear decisions, not more meetings. / My favorite interfaces are the ones users don't notice. / I care about teams where engineers and designers make calls together.

Line 4 — How to reach you

Remove the friction. Tell people what you want and how to reach you.

Examples

DM open for advisory work, or roles in consumer / climate. / Open to senior engineering roles, remote-first, US or EU timezones. hello@... / Not currently looking but happy to chat about ML systems design.

A full example

I help early-stage B2B SaaS teams ship product their users actually want. Led product at two Series A → C companies; shipped to 400k+ monthly active users across both. I believe great product comes from clear bets and fast feedback, not longer roadmaps. DM open for advisory work or PM roles at mission-driven startups. anna@example.com

Headline — the most valuable 220 characters

Your headline is the line under your name. It follows you across every comment, connection request, and search result. Recruiter search weights this line heavily — "Senior Product Manager" is worth more than "Passionate about building things".

Weak

Passionate leader | Building amazing experiences | Dog dad

Strong

Senior Product Manager @ [Company] · B2B SaaS · Growth & experimentation · ex-[PrevCo]

Photo, banner, custom URL

- Photo: shoulders-up, good lighting, soft smile, one colored background. Not a group photo, not a wedding photo, not a selfie.
- Banner: your company's brand banner if you're at one people would recognize, or a subtle abstract gradient. Don't leave the default blue.
- Custom URL: linkedin.com/in/firstnamelastname. Never /in/firstnamelastname-4a8b2f9c. Edit from your Contact Info settings.

The 5 things to remove today

1. Any sentence starting with "Passionate about…"
2. Skill lists in paragraph form ("my skills include…")
3. Third-person bios ("Anna is a…") unless you're actually a public figure
4. Endorsements you don't want — prune them from your Skills section
5. Every job older than 10 years with more than 2 bullets (compress them)

Update cadence

Revisit your About every 6 months. Update line 2 (the proof) as your most recent scope changes. Update line 4 (what you're open to) every time your context shifts. That's it. LinkedIn rewards freshness, and you'll show up in more recruiter searches every time you edit the top third.

Article 4

Pivoting careers? How to make your CV tell a story

Career changers fight two battles: convincing yourself, and convincing the recruiter. The CV is where you win both.

Pivoting is not a weakness. It's a signal of decisiveness — someone who took stock of their career and made a real move. The candidates who get punished aren't the pivoters; they're the pivoters who tried to hide their pivot. Recruiters smell it immediately.

Here's the playbook I use coaching candidates pivoting between adjacent (ops → PM, design → product) and far (finance → data science, teaching → customer success) disciplines.

Rule 1 — Name the pivot in the summary

Open your CV with a two-line summary that names the pivot explicitly and points to continuity. Don't leave the recruiter to guess.

Weak

Experienced professional with a background in multiple disciplines seeking new opportunities.

Strong

Product manager pivoting from fintech into climate tech, driven by the same belief in under-served users. 6 years shipping consumer-facing features at Series A–C companies.

The strong version names three things: the pivot, the thing that's continuous ("under-served users"), and the credibility ("6 years shipping consumer-facing features"). That's the whole story compressed into one sentence.

Rule 2 — Translate your old experience into the new domain's language

Every discipline has its own vocabulary. If you don't translate your bullets, the recruiter reads you as foreign. If you translate them, the reader sees that your work maps to their world.

Untranslated

Ran retention experiments on subscription cohorts to reduce churn.

Translated for healthtech

Ran behavioral interventions on patient cohorts to improve 90-day engagement; same rigor, different domain.

Be honest about the mapping. Don't fake the domain — just translate.

Rule 3 — Show proof you've done the homework

The #1 objection to a pivoter is: "What if they change their mind in 6 months?" Your CV needs to preempt that objection. Proof can be:

- A side project in the new field
- A certification or bootcamp completed recently
- Volunteer work in the space

- A stretch assignment at your current job that touched the new domain
- Consistent writing or speaking on the topic

Where to put it

Add a "Transition projects" or "Recent learning" section right after your summary — above your formal experience — so recruiters see the commitment before they see the domain mismatch.

Rule 4 — The cover letter pivot formula

Even if the company says cover letters are optional, write one when you're pivoting. Three paragraphs, each does one job.

1. Paragraph 1: Why this role, specifically. One concrete thing about the company that pulled you here.
2. Paragraph 2: Why the pivot. One honest sentence about what changed for you. Then what's continuous with your past work.
3. Paragraph 3: What you bring that a same-domain candidate doesn't. Your "outsider advantage" — a perspective they can't hire from inside.

Paragraph 3 example

I've spent six years making pricing interfaces clearer for people who don't think about money all day. That pattern — designing for users who aren't expert users — is the same challenge your patient-facing product is solving. I'd rather bring fresh eyes to that problem than promote from inside the industry's assumptions.

Rule 5 — How to handle gaps in interviews

If your pivot involved a gap — bootcamp, travel, caring for family, burn-out recovery — don't dance around it. Practice a clean, one-sentence version.

Confident gap framing

I took 8 months off between roles to care for a family member and spend real time thinking about what I wanted next. I used the second half of that time to ship a climate data side project, which is what eventually pointed me here.

The pattern: state the gap, name the use of the time, land on what it led to. Don't apologize.

Rule 6 — Own the outsider advantage in interviews

When the interviewer asks "why pivot now?", your answer should not be defensive. It should treat the pivot as an asset.

Defensive

I know I don't have direct experience in this, but I'm a fast learner…

Confident

I'm coming into this with a fresh perspective on [specific pattern], which I think has real value on a team that's been deep in the domain for years. Here's an example of how that's played out for me before…

Three short real pivot stories

Operations → product management

Anna led vendor ops at a marketplace. She kept shipping internal tools for her team because vendors couldn't onboard themselves. Her CV summary led with "Operator pivoting to product through the 0→1 of self-serve onboarding." She got her first PM role in 6 weeks.

Teaching → customer success

Marco taught high school English. Applied to an EdTech company. His cover letter opened with: "I've been the exact user your customers' users are — and I've been in the room when teachers adopt or abandon tools." Hired for a Senior CSM role directly.

Finance → data science

Dara was a credit analyst. Did a 6-month part-time data science bootcamp while working. Shipped two Kaggle submissions and wrote a blog post about a pricing model. Her CV opened: "Analyst moving from credit modeling to ML; same rigor, broader surface area." Offer at a fintech within two quarters.

The final test

Hand your CV to someone who doesn't know you. Give them 20 seconds. Ask: "What kind of role do you think this person wants?" If their answer matches the role you're actually applying to, you've done the job. If not, the pivot isn't clear enough yet — and that's fixable.

Reference: Job Escape