



The 15-Minute Resume Fix

A printable checklist for career changers, people back on the job market, and anyone applying this week.

How to use it: open your resume next to one job ad you want. Set a 15-minute timer. Tick each box only when it's true.

How we work: every claim below is linked to a study or report (numbered, sources on page 2). Examples are illustrative.

1 The top third

4 minutes

Why: in an eye-tracking study of recruiters, the average initial resume screen lasted **7.4 seconds**.¹ Your top third has to answer "who is this, and why this job?" on its own.

- ☐ Name, city/region, phone, professional email and LinkedIn URL are on one or two lines.
- ☐ A headline under your name uses the **target job title** from the ad, not your old title. (e.g. "HR Coordinator · 6 years hiring and training teams")
- ☐ A 2–3 line summary leads with what overlaps with the new job, then says what you're moving into.
- ☐ Your most relevant achievement is visible without scrolling.
- ☐ Section headings are plain: Summary, Experience, Skills, Education.

2 Bullets that prove it

4 minutes

- ☐ Every bullet starts with a verb and names one result, scope or number. Delete "Responsible for" and "Helped with".
- ☐ Your recent roles have 3–5 bullets each. Older roles have 1–2.
- ☐ Adjectives ("hard-working", "team player") are replaced by evidence.
- ☐ The top bullet in each role is the one most relevant to **this** job ad.
- ☐ Every number is true and you can explain it in an interview.

BEFORE (ILLUSTRATIVE)

Responsible for training new staff.

AFTER (ILLUSTRATIVE)

Trained 6 new hires on the returns process; cut ramp-up from 4 weeks to 2.

3 Keywords and ATS check

4 minutes

Why: an applicant tracking system (ATS) was detected at **97.4%** of Fortune 500 companies.² In a Harvard Business School & Accenture survey, **88%** of employers agreed qualified high-skills candidates are vetted out because they don't match the exact job-description criteria (94% for middle-skills).³

- ☐ Highlight the skills and tools in the job ad. Each one you truly have appears on your resume **in the ad's exact words**.
- ☐ The job title from the ad appears at least once (headline or summary).
- ☐ Acronyms are spelled out once. (e.g. "Customer Relationship Management (CRM)")
- ☐ One column. No text boxes, tables, icons or photos holding key information. Dates are in one consistent format.
- ☐ Saved as the file type the ad asks for (.docx or PDF) and named Firstname-Lastname-Role.pdf.

4 Skills, proof and final pass

3 minutes

Why: LinkedIn reported that members who list 5 or more skills on their profile get up to **17x** more profile views (LinkedIn's own data, 2016).⁴ Recruiters often check your profile, so make it match your resume.

- ☐ A Skills section lists 6–10 hard skills from the ad, grouped (Tools · Methods · Languages).
- ☐ Your LinkedIn headline and top skills match the resume you're sending.
- ☐ The resume is 1 page (early career) or 2 pages max (experienced).
- ☐ You read it aloud once. No typos in your name, email, phone or the company's name.
- ☐ Anything older than ~15 years is shortened unless it matters for this job.

+ Changing careers? Add these

bonus

- ☐ Translate old job words into new-field words. ("Store manager: scheduling" becomes "workforce planning for 25 staff")
- ☐ Put relevant courses, certificates or projects in their own section near the top, with dates.
- ☐ Show 1–2 projects that use the new field's tools, even small ones (a volunteer project, a portfolio piece).
- ☐ Use the occupation's skill and task lists on O*NET to find the right terms.⁵

+ Back on the market after a gap or layoff?

bonus

- ☐ Gaps get one honest line, if any. (e.g. "2025: career break, caregiving; completed Google Data Analytics certificate")
- ☐ Any freelance, volunteer or course work in the gap is listed with dates.
- ☐ Your most recent bullets show results, not just the reason you left.

Your 15-minute score

Count your ticks across passes 1–4 (20 boxes). **18–20:** send it. **14–17:** fix pass 3 first, then send. **Under 14:** rework the top third and bullets before applying again. (This score is a ShiftUp rule of thumb, not a research finding.)

Want a second pair of eyes?

Free resume reviews are open. Reviews are anonymized, and with your permission, before/after results may be shared on ShiftUp. Details at shiftupvn.pages.dev.

Sources

1. Ladders, Inc. (2018). *Eye-Tracking Study*: recruiters' average initial resume screen = 7.4 seconds. theladders.com/static/images/basicSite/pdfs/TheLadders-EyeTracking-StudyC2.pdf
2. Jobscan (2026). *Applicant Tracking System (ATS) Usage Report*, 6th ed.: an ATS was detected at 97.4% of Fortune 500 companies. jobscan.co/blog/fortune-500-use-applicant-tracking-systems/
3. Fuller, J. B., Raman, M., Sage-Gavin, E., & Hines, K. (Sep 2021). *Hidden Workers: Untapped Talent*. Harvard Business School Project on Managing the Future of Work & Accenture. hbs.edu/managing-the-future-of-work/research/hidden-workers-untapped-talent
4. LinkedIn (2016). "5 Steps to Improve your LinkedIn Profile in Minutes", LinkedIn Blog. linkedin.com/blog/member/product/5-steps-to-improve-your-linkedin-profile-in-minutes
5. O*NET OnLine, U.S. Department of Labor: skills, tools and tasks by occupation. ononline.org

Examples on this checklist are illustrative and do not describe real people or results. The certificate named above is an example, not an endorsement.