BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Your Resume in 2026 — Free Builders, AI & the Robot Screener

Free builders, AI help, and getting past the 'robot' that reads it first

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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THE 60-SECOND VERSION

1 The 60-Second Version

The whole thing in a breath.

These days your resume usually has to get past a computer before a person sees it — screening software called an ATS, nicknamed the 'robot screener,' that scans applications and helps employers sort them. The robot is not magic: you work with it by using the job posting's own key words and phrases where they genuinely fit your experience, and by keeping your resume's formatting simple and plain so the software reads it correctly — which means standard section headings and no fancy columns, tables, graphics, or text boxes that confuse it.

You can build all this for free: there are free online resume builders, and a plain word processor like Google Docs works perfectly well. AI tools can help you draft and polish, but you must review every word, because they make things up and over-inflate. And here is the honest truth: no tool reliably 'beats' a screener, and after the robot, a human still decides — so the real goal is a clean, keyword-matched resume that passes the software and then genuinely impresses the person reading it.

- The 'robot screener' is software (an ATS) that reads your resume first.
- Use the job posting's own keywords where they truly fit your experience.
- Keep formatting simple — standard headings, no columns/tables/graphics.
- Build it free (even a word processor); use AI as a helper you check.

THE ROBOT

2 What the 'Robot Screener' Really Is

Less scary once you understand it.

The 'robot' everyone worries about has a real name: an Applicant Tracking System, or ATS. It is software that employers (especially larger ones) use to collect and organize the applications they receive. When you submit a resume online, the ATS reads it, pulls out your information, and files it in a database the employer can search and sort. For a job that gets hundreds of applicants, it is how the employer keeps track of everyone.

The fear is that the ATS 'rejects' resumes on its own, and while some systems do let employers filter or rank by keywords, the more common and important problem is simpler: if the software cannot read your resume properly — because the formatting confused it — your information gets garbled or lost, and a recruiter searching the database never finds you.

So the goal is less 'trick the robot' and more 'make sure the robot can read you correctly and finds the right words.' That is entirely within your control, and it is what the rest of this guide is about.

GOOD TO KNOW

Not every employer uses an ATS — many small businesses just receive resumes by email, where a person reads them directly. But because you often cannot tell which is which, it is wise to build every resume to be ATS-friendly. A resume that reads cleanly for the software also reads cleanly for a human, so you lose nothing by doing it.

FREE TOOLS

3 Building It for Free

You do not need to pay for a good resume.

The resume-building websites push paid plans hard, but you do not need to spend a cent to make a strong, modern resume. There are several good free routes, and the simplest is often the best.

Option	What it is	Watch for
A word processor	Google Docs or Word, with a simple template	Reliable and free; just keep the layout plain
Free resume builders	Online tools with templates	Some lock the PDF download behind a paywall
AI resume helpers	Tools that draft or tailor for you	Free tiers are limited; review everything they write

A plain word processor like Google Docs (free with a Google account) or Microsoft Word is genuinely one of the best choices, because you control the formatting completely and can keep it clean and ATS-friendly. Online resume builders can be handy for their templates, but watch for the common trap where building is free but downloading your finished resume as a file requires paying — and some of their fancier templates use the very columns and graphics that confuse the screener. Free and simple beats flashy and paid here.

WATCH OUT

Before you invest time in any 'free' builder, check whether it actually lets you download your resume as a PDF or Word file for free. Some let you build the whole thing, then demand payment at the one moment you need the file. A word processor never does that to you.

AI HELP

4 Using AI Tools Wisely

A helpful assistant you must supervise.

AI writing tools can genuinely help with a resume — suggesting how to phrase an accomplishment, tightening clunky sentences, or drafting a first version from your notes. Used as a helper, they save time and can lift your writing. But they come with real dangers that make reviewing every word non-negotiable.

- AI can invent things — it may add skills, dates, or achievements you never had. Every claim on your resume must be true, so check each one.
- AI tends to over-inflate, producing grand, generic phrasing that rings hollow to a human reader. Trim it back to specific, honest accomplishments.
- AI may not know the specific job — it is you who must tailor the keywords to the actual posting.
- Different AI resume tools make big 'pass rate' claims that are marketing, not proof — do not trust the numbers.

The right way to use AI is as a first-draft assistant and a polisher, with you firmly in charge of the truth and the tailoring. Feed it your real experience, let it help you phrase things, then read every line critically: is it true, is it specific, does it sound like me? A resume that is honest and tailored by you, with AI's help on the wording, beats one the AI wrote on its own every time — because a human will read it, and humans smell inflated nonsense.

WATCH OUT

Never let an AI tool add an accomplishment, skill, or job you did not actually have. Beyond being dishonest, it falls apart the moment an interviewer asks about it. Use AI to describe your real experience better — never to invent experience you lack.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

KEYWORDS

5 Matching the Keywords

Speak the job posting's language.

This is the single most useful technique for getting past the screener and catching a recruiter's eye: use the same words the job posting uses. The ATS and the recruiter are looking for particular skills and terms, and if the posting asks for 'inventory management' and your resume says 'stock control,' the match may be missed. Mirroring the posting's language — where it truly describes what you have done — is how you line up.

1. Open the job posting and read it carefully, ideally in a second window beside your resume.
2. Pick out the key skills, tools, and phrases it emphasizes — the ones repeated or listed as requirements.
3. Work those exact terms into your resume wherever they genuinely describe your real experience.
4. Tailor this for each job you apply to — a resume matched to the specific posting beats one generic resume sent everywhere.
5. Read it back to make sure it still flows and sounds like a person, not a keyword list.

WATCH OUT

Do not 'keyword stuff' — cramming in terms you do not match, or pasting a hidden block of keywords. Screeners and recruiters catch it, it reads as dishonest, and it can get you rejected. Only use a keyword where it honestly reflects something you've actually done.

FORMATTING

6 Formatting the Robot Can Read

Simple and plain wins.

How your resume is laid out matters as much as what it says, because fancy formatting is exactly what confuses the screening software — and can scramble your information so a human never sees it properly. The rule is refreshingly simple: keep it plain.

- Use standard section headings the software expects: 'Experience,' 'Education,' 'Skills' — not clever custom labels.
- Avoid columns, tables, and text boxes — they can be read out of order or skipped entirely.
- Avoid graphics, logos, photos, and charts — the screener cannot read them, and they add nothing it can use.
- Use a common, readable font and simple bullet points, not fancy symbols.
- Put your contact details in the body of the resume, not in the header or footer, which some systems ignore.

Save and send your resume in the format the job asks for — usually a PDF or a Word document — and if you built it in a fancy tool, open the exported file and check it looks right and the text is selectable (not a picture). A clean, plain, single-column resume with ordinary headings is read perfectly by both the robot and the recruiter. You are not making it ugly; you are making it universally readable, which is its own kind of professional.

TIP

A quick test: open your finished resume file and try to select and copy the text with your mouse. If it copies out cleanly and in the right order, the software can read it too. If the text is a locked image or comes out jumbled, the formatting will trip the screener — simplify it.

THE LIMITS

7 The Honest Limits of All This

No magic bullet, and a human still decides.

Amid all the fear and all the tools promising to 'beat the ATS,' it is worth being honest about what is real. No tool or trick reliably games an employer's screening software — the ones selling that promise are selling marketing, not magic. And the screener is only a gatekeeper, not the decision-maker.

After your resume passes the software, a human being reads it and decides whether to call you. That means all the ATS-friendliness in the world is wasted if the resume does not then impress a person: clear accomplishments, honest and specific, well written, relevant to the job. So do the sensible things — keywords, clean formatting, a free solid tool, AI as a checked helper — to get past the robot, but pour your real effort into making the content genuinely good for the human.

The robot gets you in the door; the human invites you to the interview.

GOOD TO KNOW

The best resume strategy has not really changed: tell the truth, show specific accomplishments with real results, tailor it to each job, and keep it clean and readable. The 'robot' just adds one requirement — be readable to software too — which a plain, honest resume satisfies naturally. Do not let the technology distract you from writing a genuinely strong resume.

QUESTIONS

8 Plain Questions and Answers

The things job-seekers ask most.

"Should I pay for a resume builder or an ATS tool?"

Usually no. You can build an excellent, ATS-friendly resume for free in a word processor, and tailor the keywords yourself. Paid tools and 'pass rate' guarantees are mostly marketing. If a paid tool genuinely saves you time and you can afford it, fine — but it is not necessary to succeed.

"PDF or Word document — which should I send?"

Send whatever the job posting asks for. If it does not specify, a PDF is usually safe and preserves your layout — just make sure it is a real text PDF (where you can select the text), not a scanned image. Some older systems prefer Word; follow the posting's lead.

"Will AI-written resumes get flagged or rejected?"

The bigger risk is not being 'flagged' but being generic and inflated, which turns off human readers. Use AI to help with wording, but make the content specifically yours and honest. A tailored, truthful resume reads well whether AI helped with the phrasing or not.

"Do small local employers even use this software?"

Many do not — plenty of small businesses just read resumes emailed to them. But since you usually can't tell in advance, building every resume to be clean and ATS-friendly costs you nothing and helps everywhere, because a software-readable resume is also an easy-to-read one for people.

WRAP UP

9 Readable to the Robot, Great for the Human

Simple habits, honest content.

The modern resume has two readers — a screening computer and then a person — and a good one satisfies both without any dark magic. Understand that the 'robot' is just software (an ATS) that reads and sorts your resume, and work with it by using the job posting's own keywords where they honestly fit and by keeping your formatting plain: standard headings, a single clean column, no graphics or tables that confuse it.

Build it for free — a word processor is ideal — and let AI help you draft and polish while you guard the truth of every word. Then remember the honest limit: no tool reliably beats a screener, and a human makes the real decision, so put your best effort into genuinely strong, specific, truthful content.

Readable to the robot, impressive to the human — that is the whole recipe.

- The 'robot screener' (ATS) reads and sorts your resume before a person does.
- Use the job posting's exact keywords where they truly fit — no stuffing.
- Keep formatting plain: standard headings, no columns, tables, or graphics.
- Build it free (a word processor works); use AI as a helper you check.
- No tool reliably beats a screener — a human decides, so make the content genuinely good.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> If the whole business of resumes and screening software feels overwhelming, I am glad to sit down and help — getting a clean, ATS-friendly resume set up in a free tool, learning to tailor the keywords to a posting, and using AI helpers safely without being fooled by them. You bring your real experience; I'll help you present it so both the robot and the hiring manager take notice.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this page handy. It points you straight to what to do for each task.

I want to…	Do this
Know the 'robot'	It's screening software (an ATS) that scans your resume first
Build it free	Free builders exist; even a plain word processor works well
Use AI as a helper	AI can draft and polish — but you review every word
Match the keywords	Use the job posting's own words where they truly fit
Format simply	Plain layout, standard headings — no columns, graphics, or tables
Know the limits	No tool reliably 'beats' a screener; a human still decides
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

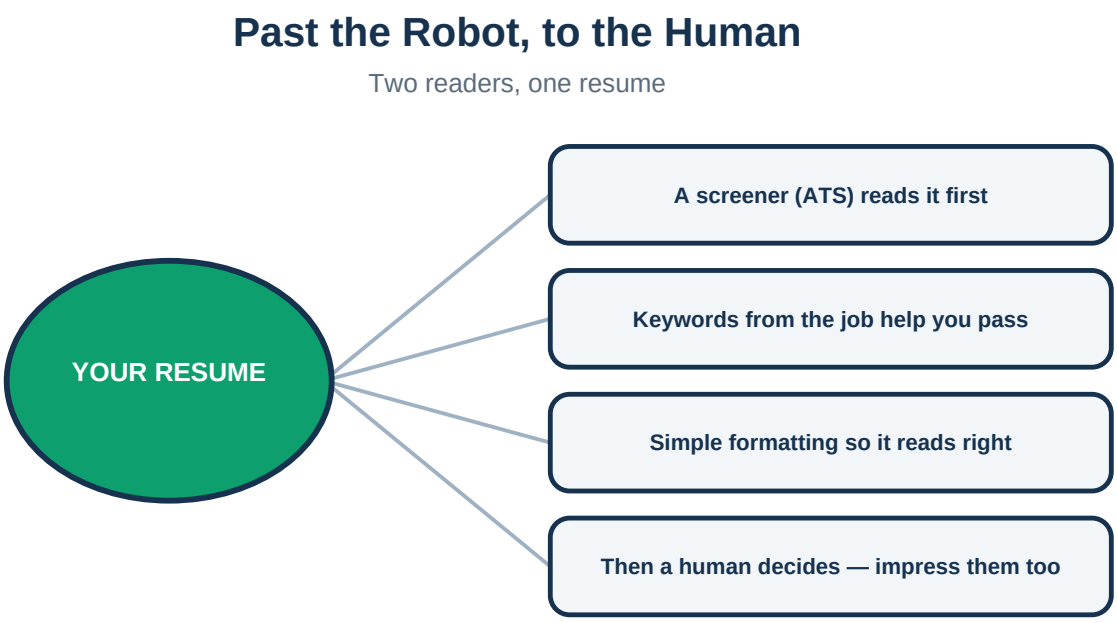


Illustration — a schematic. Set-up screens differ; each takes only a few minutes.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Building a Modern Resume

Four steps

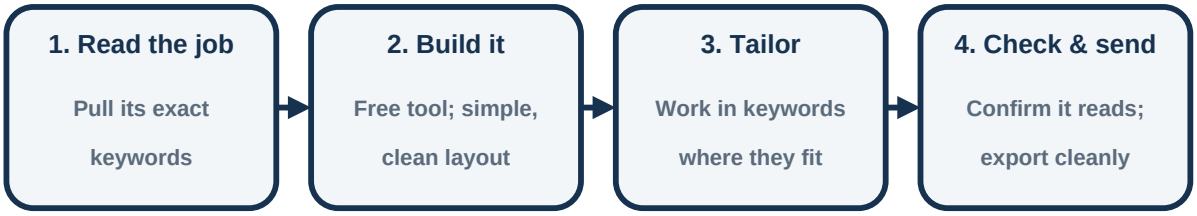


Illustration — a schematic. The order is a suggestion; do one box at a time.

A schematic of the plan — company steps vary; the order does not have to.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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