

Tattoo Artist

Draw on skin for a living. An apprenticeship, a state license, and a portfolio that has to be good.

TYPICAL PAY

\$74,750

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$31k to \$128k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

2 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

**Tattoo studios, private rooms,
conventions, your own shop**

How you get there

- 1 Draw, constantly** Years, starting now
 Fill sketchbooks. Shops want to see line quality, shading and the ability to design something that will still read in ten years.
- 2 Build a portfolio** 6 to 18 months
 Thirty to a hundred finished drawings, not doodles. Tattoo-ready designs in the styles you want to work in.
- 3 Get an apprenticeship** Months of trying
 The hard step. You walk into shops, show the book, get turned down, improve it and go back. Personality matters as much as skill.
- 4 Apprentice** 1 to 3 years
 Cleaning, setup, sterilization, drawing, then practice skin, then friends who agreed to it, then paying clients.
- 5 License and first chair** Weeks
 Bloodborne pathogen training, your state's artist license, then booth rent or a split at a shop.

Pros and cons

- + You get paid to draw, and people keep the work forever
- + No degree and no student debt required
- + You control your own schedule, prices and the work you take
- One to three unpaid years before you earn anything
- No sick pay, no paid holidays and no employer health insurance
- Income swings hard with the season and your booking list

Good to know

The rules change at the county line

Tattooing is regulated by states and sometimes by individual counties, so the training, fees and inspections you need can be completely different an hour's drive away. There is no national licens...

The safety body does not police anyone

The Alliance of Professional Tattooists, founded in 1992, publishes health and safety guidance and runs disease transmission training, but it says plainly that it does not license, certify or police tattooists. Enf...

Optional boosts

Blackwork and fine line. Realism and portrait. Japanese traditional. Cover-ups.

Where these numbers come from

O*NET OnLine: Artists and Related Workers, All Other (27-1019.00)

Alliance of Professional Tattooists

Texas Department of State Health Services: tattoo and body piercing studios

Oregon Health Licensing Office

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/tattoo-artist>



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