



TATTOOS ARE FOR EVERYBODY

**A GUIDE TO BEING A BLACK OR
POC TATTOO CUSTOMER**

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INTRODUCTION

Why did I write this?

I've been getting tattooed since 2010, writing about tattoo culture since 2015 and currently I manage bookings for a tattooer.

Over the years, I've gotten several requests about how to navigate tattoo shops as a customer who is black or a person of colour.

The reality is, even with the advent of visual social media, like Instagram, it can be hard to find black and brown people with tattoos. So I decided to put together a free guide on how to approach an artist, what to include and basic tattoo etiquette.

Tattoos are for everybody, no matter your skin tone.

Here's how you can get yours.

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FINDING AN ARTIST

Tattoos start with finding an artist you love. First step? Head over to Google or Instagram.

Once you've narrowed down what style you want, a tattooer's Instagram feed can be likened to a virtual tattoo portfolio. Follow hashtags relevant to the style you're interested in and you're bound to find artists you like.

Another good thing to do is bookmark the artists that your friends are going to.

If you have darker skin, it's imperative to look at the tattooer's feed and see what their work looks like on deeper skin tones.

Artists who know how to work on certain tones **will have a steady stream of black or brown clients.**

You'll see it on their feed that they regularly work with people of colour. If you can't find any, you might not want to go to that particular artist.

Since we're dealing with a pandemic right now, there's little chance of being able to go into a shop and check it out for yourself.

However, do peruse the shop's socials or website. This will give you a good idea about just who you're going to be around and whether you'll feel comfortable. Shops with an inclusive approach will have that kind of language and atmosphere from the beginning.

If you're getting an unfriendly, unaccommodating energy then don't bother. Your gut is most likely right and you don't need to deal with microaggressions in a space.

HOW TO GET IN CONTACT

So you've decided on getting a tattoo, picked out an artist and want to start the booking process.

You can usually check out an artist's Instagram account, website or their shop website, if they have one, for instructions on how to book.

When crafting an email, please include the following:

- Your concept, including size and placement on the body
- Image and design references
- Ask about a quote and date availability

As someone who sifts through this kind of content, having all this information up front is helpful. An artist can determine whether your design is their style, how much your quote will be and whether you need a consultation.

WHAT TO PREPARE FOR A CONSULT

A consultation is a meeting and discussion, either in person or via virtual spaces, about what you want to get tattooed. You'll provide more details about where you want it, what space you've got to work with and how they can execute the concept.

A consult is important to manage expectations along with getting both the client and artist on the same page. If you're starting a larger project, like a leg or arm sleeve, it's best to chat to an artist and just get all the information upfront.

RED FLAGS TO LOOK OUT FOR

An inadequate or stolen portfolio

You'd be surprised how many artists have stolen tattoos and used someone else's work on their Instagram page. It's important to look at the work displayed and if it seems familiar – that's probably because it is. Most tattooers won't replicate another artist's work, but it still happens.

Racist microaggressions

This is self-explanatory, but there are certain kinds of covert racist microaggressions you'll deal with as a black or brown person. If an artist or shop makes some weird stereotypical comment about your accent, your hair, your skin or your name, just leave. Don't give them your money. Don't book with them.

Harassment

Unfortunately, the tattoo industry isn't exempt from sexual harassment. If an artist is insisting on you taking off your top when it's not necessary, making lewd comments or being suggestive - that is a huge warning sign. You shouldn't have more than one person in the room with you and a professional will ensure you feel safe. Getting tattooed is an intimate process and if you feel uneasy, compromised or unsure, don't push that feeling aside.

Not having the proper PPE

At the core of it, a tattoo is a wound. There will be bodily fluids and they need to be disposed of properly. A tattoo artist shouldn't be working in an unhygienic environment and there needs to be disposable personal protective equipment on the tattoo bed or chair. Your artist needs to use fresh gloves, have disposable liners on the bed to protect their equipment and sanitise their space.

TATTOO ETIQUETTE

Don't expect a discount

That needle is going to go into your skin and create something that's going to be there for life. The hourly rate or quote you pay goes towards brand-new needles, sterile gloves, the artist's labour and shop fees.

Come prepared

Don't forget to eat something before your session and ask about what time you should arrive. Shower, brush your teeth and don't drink the night before. In the times of COVID-19, you're most likely going to wear a mask throughout your session and you won't be allowed to bring a friend along to the studio either.

Don't cancel at the last minute

If you're scared to get tattooed or just can't make your appointment, cancel at least a week ahead of time. Late cancellations are just unprofessional and can throw a whole schedule off.

Ask plenty of questions

It's a pretty big decision to modify your body and even if you feel nervous, ask all the questions you need to. A good artist will thoroughly explain the process, make you feel at ease and give you the right aftercare instructions.

Make sure you ask about aftercare

One of the most important steps in preserving the work you just got, is adhering to the right aftercare instructions. Ask your tattooer for instructions, as each artist has their own method. Write it down and don't scratch your new tattoo! Even when it's itchy.

HOW TO PREP FOR A TATTOO SESSION

Okay, so you've figured out what you want, gone through the booking process and now you have a date.

There's a bit of preparation to do for your first tattoo.

- **Make sure you don't drink the night before.** Alcohol takes a while to leave your body and will affect how the tattoo session goes. You're more likely to bleed and swell up during the process.
- **Up your vitamin C and zinc intake.** Try and consume these supplements as they promote wound healing and help your body bounce back. Eat a wholesome, low GI supper and breakfast. Your body needs as much fuel as possible and this will make sure your blood sugar won't spike.
- **Shower in the morning and make yourself presentable.** Your tattoo artist will defuzz the area of your body getting tattooed, but that doesn't mean you can't shave if needs be. You're going to be in close proximity with your artist, please be clean.
- **Take some snacks and water along.** In times of COVID-19 this isn't always possible, as you need to wear a mask. But it's important to hydrate beforehand, you should be able to take short breaks if your session is long. Make sure to take along healthy snacks, like a banana, some nuts or an energy bar, and eat them before you get into the shop so your body has some fuel.
- **Wear appropriate clothing.** If you need to bring along another top or a gown, don't forget to wear the right kind of clothes for your session.



AND NOW FOR SOME FINAL ADVICE

Getting tattooed over a long period of time means you get some insight, through trial and error. Here's what I've learnt over the last decade or so.

Every single tattoo you have doesn't have to have a profound meaning

Yes, really. There's this underlying assumption to get a tattoo that "means something". My first tattoo was a line from a poem I loved at 18. I still love the concept, but things you like at 19 aren't always what you love at 29 or 39. Life is long, you will change and your ideas will shift. One tattoo I got recently was from a music video I loved. It makes me laugh and think of two artists I enjoy dearly. It actually doesn't have to be that deep or interesting.

Think about placement

While your tattoo doesn't have to have meaning, the placement of your piece needs to have some major thought behind it. Don't pull a move like I did at 19 and get a hand tattoo. I have always known that I'd be in relatively lax work environments, but if you're aiming to go into corporate, take some time before you tattoo visible spots like your neck, your hands or your arms. Placement is important because you will deal with people who want to touch your tattoo. It doesn't matter how unfriendly you think you look, human curiosity will outweigh any of that. If you don't want to be covered up all the time, just think about it.

MORE FINAL ADVICE

Your aesthetics will change

Tattoos go through very distinct trends: you'll see a specific style garnering a lot of attention on social media at any given time. While you may like a few new trends, as you get older that will move to something else. When I started doing my own tattoo research, I liked fine-line lettering (I still do) and black & white realism. As I got older, I gravitated towards bolder blackwork and hardly got any colour anymore. I don't regret any tattoos I have but the reality is, your aesthetics evolve.

Leave foreign languages the hell alone

Honestly, unless you speak the language, just don't get any foreign language tattoos. There's too much at risk, like spelling mistakes or seriously incorrect translations.

Large-scale pieces require thorough research

Your legs, back and arms have a lot of space. More than you might think at the beginning. It took close to a decade to figure out my back piece and even then, it was an ongoing discussion with my artist about what I wanted. I sent her my design elements and she came up with a design I didn't even know was possible.

Tattoos are expensive

While the raging classism and exclusion within the industry is rife and undeniable – a good tattoo will be pricey. I'm not aiming to bash anyone (especially people of colour who are routinely excluded) trying to get their start. But tattoos are a wound, they require certain elements to work and that costs money. There are a host of risks involved in tattooing and these include allergic reactions, bloodborne diseases and staph infections. You're paying for art, labour, a safe environment and proper hygiene practices.

FIN.

Thank you for reading this and I hope you find this entire ebook helpful. I wanted to create a free resource that could be shared with friends and so I had an answer for any tattoo-related queries. This is going to be a living document and regularly updated just to account for life events, like a pandemic occurring.

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