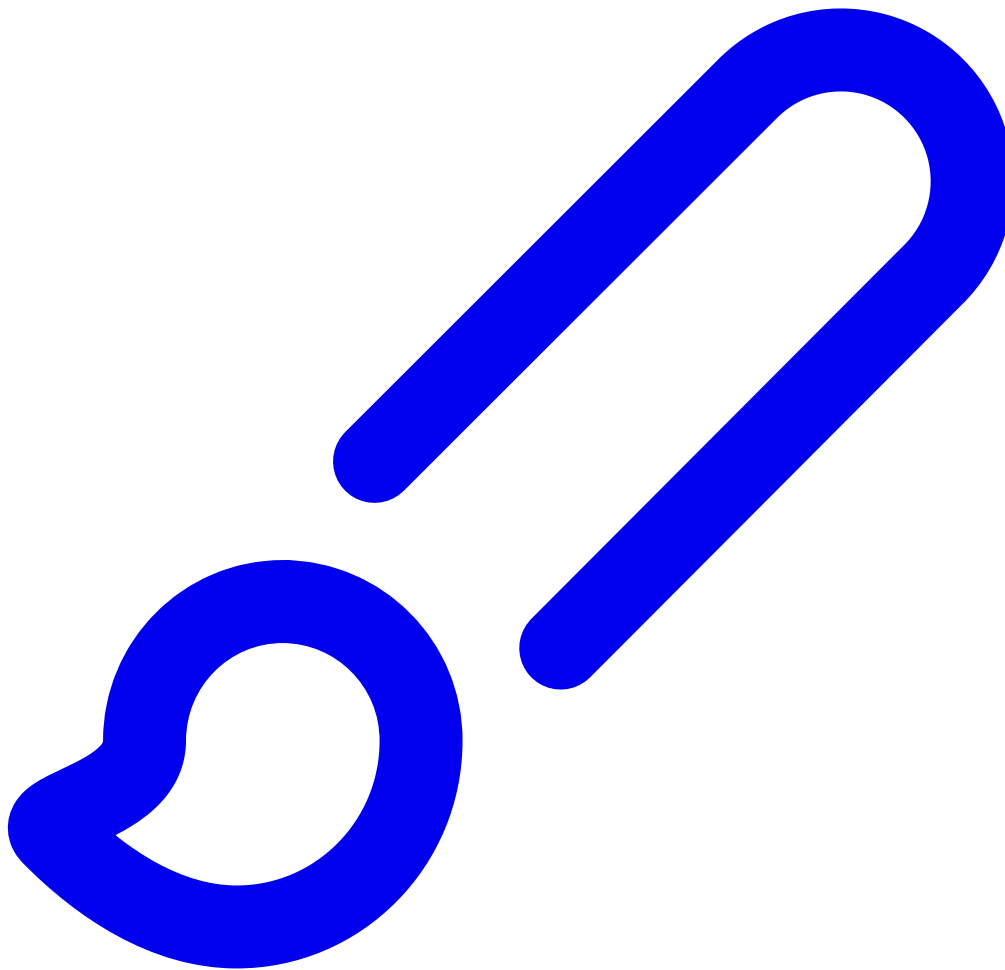




[Double Down Tattoo](#) 

[Tools](#) [Guides](#) [About](#)

[Home](#) / [Guides](#) / Choosing an Artist
Artist

How to Design a Custom Tattoo You'll Love for Life

By the [Double Down Tattoo Editorial Team](#) · Reviewed against our [editorial standards](#) · 8 min read · Last reviewed 2026

Disclaimer: This article is for general information only and is not medical advice. Consult a qualified healthcare professional before making decisions about your health or treatment.

How to Design a Custom Tattoo You'll Love for Life

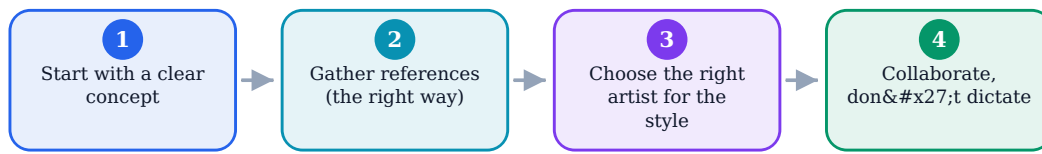


Figure: How to Design a Custom Tattoo You'll Love for Life

A custom tattoo — one designed specifically for you rather than picked off a wall — can be deeply meaningful and truly one of a kind. But a great custom piece rarely appears fully formed. It grows from a clear idea, good references, and a genuine collaboration between you and a skilled artist.

This guide walks through how to develop a custom tattoo idea, gather useful references, and work with your artist to create a design you'll love for life.

Advertisement

On this page

1. [Start with a clear concept](#)
2. [Gather references \(the right way\)](#)
3. [Choose the right artist for the style](#)
4. [Collaborate, don't dictate](#)
5. [Think about placement and size](#)
6. [Aim for timelessness and take your time](#)
7. [Gathering references the right way](#)
8. [Placement and size shape the design](#)
9. [Collaborating with your artist](#)

Start with a clear concept

Every strong custom tattoo begins with a **concept** — the core idea and, often, the **meaning** behind it. Ask yourself what you want the tattoo to represent, what elements feel essential, and what feeling it should convey. A clear starting idea gives both you and your artist a foundation to build on. You don't need every detail figured out, but you do need a direction.

Gather references (the right way)

References are how you communicate a vision that's hard to put into words. Collect images that capture the *style*, *elements*, *mood* and *details* you're drawn to — but treat them as inspiration, not something to copy exactly. A good reference set helps your artist understand what you want while leaving room for them to create something original and personal to you.

Choose the right artist for the style

A custom design lives or dies on the artist's skill in the **right style**. Whether you want fine line, realism, traditional, or something else, find an artist whose portfolio shows they excel at it. The best custom tattoos come from artists working within their strengths. Choosing the right specialist is as much a part of designing your tattoo as the concept itself.

Collaborate, don't dictate

The magic of a custom tattoo is **collaboration**. Share your concept and references, then genuinely listen to your artist's input. They understand how designs translate to skin, how lines and details will age, and what will read clearly at a given size. Trusting their expertise — while staying true to your vision — usually produces something better than either of you would create alone.

Think about placement and size

Where a tattoo goes affects how it should be designed. **Placement and size** influence the level of detail that will work, how the design flows with the body, and how it will look over time. Discuss this with your artist early, since it shapes the design. A concept that works beautifully at one size or location may need adapting for another.

Aim for timelessness and take your time

Because a tattoo is permanent, it's worth designing with **the long term** in mind. Consider whether the design will still feel right to you in years, and lean on your artist's judgement about what tends to age well. Above all, **don't rush** — give the design process the time it deserves. A custom tattoo you've thought through and refined with a skilled artist is one you're far more likely to love for life.

Gathering references the right way

References guide your artist, but how you use them matters. The goal is inspiration and direction, not a copy of someone else's tattoo:

- Collect images for *elements* you like — style, mood, composition, colour.
- Include non-tattoo references too: photos, art, textures that capture the feeling.
- Note what specifically appeals in each, so your artist understands the 'why'.
- Avoid asking for an exact replica of another artist's work — aim for something yours.

Placement and size shape the design

A design and its location are inseparable, and thinking about them together leads to better results:

Consideration	Why it matters
Body contour	Designs should flow with the body's shape, not fight it
Size vs detail	Fine detail needs enough size to hold up as it ages

Size vs detail	The detail needs enough size to hold up as it ages
Visibility	Where it sits affects work, lifestyle and how often you see it
Ageing	Some placements and styles age more gracefully than others

Discussing these with your artist early prevents a beautiful idea from being compromised by an impractical size or spot.

Collaborating with your artist

The best custom tattoos come from genuine collaboration rather than either handing over total control or dictating every line, and understanding that balance improves both the process and the result. You bring the concept, the personal meaning and your preferences, while your artist brings technical expertise about what will work on skin, hold up over time and suit the placement you're considering. Sharing your idea clearly — including any meaning behind it — helps the artist design something that fits you, and staying open to their professional suggestions often produces a stronger piece than rigidly insisting on your first vision. When they propose changes, it's usually for sound reasons such as legibility, longevity or how the design sits on the body, so it's worth listening even when it differs from what you pictured. At the same time, it's your tattoo, so speaking up honestly if something doesn't feel right is important; a good artist wants you to love the result and will work with you rather than steamrolling your input. Reviewing the design before the session, taking time to sit with it, and asking for adjustments while it's still on paper are all far easier than regretting something permanent. Treating the relationship as a partnership — your ideas and meaning combined with their craft and judgement — is what turns a concept into a custom tattoo that is both technically excellent and genuinely yours, and it tends to make the whole experience more enjoyable as well.

Printable checklist

Print this page or save the PDF to keep these steps handy.

- ☐ Start with a clear concept
- ☐ Gather references (the right way)
- ☐ Choose the right artist for the style
- ☐ Collaborate, don't dictate
- ☐ Think about placement and size
- ☐ Aim for timelessness and take your time
- ☐ Gathering references the right way
- ☐ Placement and size shape the design

Summary

Designing a custom tattoo starts with a clear concept and the meaning behind it, then gathering references that communicate the style, elements and feel you want. The most

important step is collaborating with a skilled artist who works in your desired style, trusting their expertise on what will work as a tattoo. Consider placement, keep an eye on timelessness, and give the process time. The result should feel unmistakably yours.

Key Takeaways

- A great custom design grows from a clear idea and its meaning.
- Gather references for style, elements and feel — not to copy.
- Collaborate with an artist who specialises in your desired style.
- Trust the artist's expertise on what works as a tattoo.
- Consider placement and aim for a design that ages well.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need to be able to draw to design a custom tattoo?

Not at all. Your job is to bring a clear concept and references; the artist translates it into a design. Collaboration, not drawing skill, is what matters.

Can I bring reference images to my artist?

Yes — references are very helpful for communicating style and feel. Use them as inspiration rather than something to copy exactly, and let your artist create something original for you.

How do I make sure I'll still like it years from now?

Choose a concept that's meaningful rather than purely trend-driven, consider timelessness, and lean on your artist's experience about what ages well. Taking your time with the design also helps.

Related Guides

- [How to Choose a Tattoo Artist](#)
- [Choosing Tattoo Placement](#)
- [Your First Tattoo: What to Expect](#)
- [The Custom Tattoo Design Process](#)
- [Tattoo Styles Explained](#)

Related articles

- [Your First Tattoo: What to Expect Before, During and After](#)
- [How to Take Care of an Old Tattoo So It Stays Sharp](#)
- [Choosing Tattoo Placement: Pain, Visibility and Aging Considerations](#)

Source: <https://doubledowntattoo.com/how-to-design-a-custom-tattoo.html> — Educational content. Verify time-sensitive details against current sources.