

Exercise #12

Estimating the Cost of a Major (and Permanent) Purchase

You'll probably make a lot of important money decisions throughout your life, but perhaps none as permanent as getting a tattoo. This chapter discusses how tattoo shops price out their tattoos, and how you can budget for this important (and often expensive) purchase.

Some tattoo shops price tattoos by the hour, while others set a flat price for each piece. One Winnipeg artist, for example, explained that his shop's minimum is \$130 for the smallest and simplest piece, and goes up from there.

“So even if someone wants just a dot, it would still be \$130,” he says. “After that, size, detail, colour, and shading all factor into the price.”

For example, he says, a nice detailed coloured piece approximately 4 x 7 inches might be \$500. A full sleeve might run between \$2,000 to \$8,000, depending on detail.

Another shop that charges by the piece explained that the biggest consideration is the size of the tattoo, but that other variables are also important.

“For something about the size of the palm of your hand, you might be paying about \$200,” one of their employees explained. “But, if that tattoo is just a few lines of writing, it might be more like \$160. If it's very detailed and intricate, then you may be looking at closer to \$260.”

Other shops charge by the hour. They usually have a shop minimum – usually \$100 - \$150 – for anything under one hour, but after that charge an hourly rate. At one shop,

the rate is \$150 per hour. At another, it varies depending on the artist. There are a few students who are just getting established as artists, and their rate might be closer to \$50, while the experienced artists charge about \$150 per hour.

In order to estimate the cost of your tattoo, it helps to have an idea how long it will take. One shop employee, for example, says that a 4 x 4 inch piece might take half an hour if it was just a basic symbol, but if it was more detailed it might take two hours or even three. A full sleeve, she says, is going to take about four appointments, and could run you about \$2,000 to \$3,000, again depending on detail.



Another employee estimates the length of time it takes to do a sleeve at anywhere from 7 to 20 hours depending on several factors.

“If the person is a good sitter, or if they’re fidgety, is going to make a big difference,” she says. “Also, it matters if the tattoo is traditional, with not much detail, or realistic, with a lot of shading.”

A word or a short line of writing could be anywhere from half an hour to two hours, depending on the length of the word and the font. A detailed colour piece about 4 x 7 inches could be 10 to 20 hours, and a smaller coloured piece might take 4-5. Tribal designs tend to take a lot longer, all of the artists agreed.

“You’re putting a ton of black into a person’s skin, so it can take a while to make sure you really pump it in there rather than just having it sit at the top of the person’s skin,” explained an employee from Metamorphosis, a popular shop in Winnipeg.

An artist from another shop agrees. “Getting a nice, even, solid black line is extremely time-consuming, while not over-working the skin. The best way to test this theory is to use water colour paints. Try to make a nice large solid black design without ruining the integrity of the paper. That’s tough, whereas using multiple colours and blends is much easier to do.”

Some shops charge a design fee on top of the hourly rate or flat price of the piece. This is a fee paid straight to the tattoo artist for the time it took them to custom-draw your tattoo.

“Some pieces might charge no design fee,” explains one employee. “If it’s just a word or something that can be printed off the computer, there’s no charge for that. But if the

artist has to work here for eight hours and then go home and spend the night drawing an elaborate back piece, it might be \$200 or \$250. Something smaller and simpler might be \$20-\$25.”

A final cost to consider is a tip. The artists we interviewed say that not everybody tips, but that it's very much appreciated when they do. Most people who do tip figure out their tip the way they would a tip for good service at a bar or restaurant – around 15-20% of the price of the tattoo.

Aftercare for a tattoo is important, but it's usually free. Most shops send a customer home with a bottle of vitamin E gel, some unscented lotion, and instructions for caring for their tattoo. Tattoos can take about a month to heal, depending on the person's skin type and the location of the tattoo.

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If you were to get a tattoo (or another tattoo), what would you get? What type of design? Where on your body? How big would it be? What colours? Would the image you choose have some special significance to you?

Use the space below to draw a rough sketch (or a detailed one) of your tattoo design.

Let's say the shop you've chosen has a \$125 minimum, and charges by the hour for your tattoo. There are three artists to choose between. Stephen is a student who has been tattooing for just a few months. He doesn't have a lot of experience but a friend of yours says he does great work and has a sweet back piece to prove it. Alycia is a well-regarded artist with an impressive portfolio and a knack for realistic tattoos. Then there's Larry, "the best guy in town", who it takes six months to get an appointment with. Their hourly rates are listed below:

Artist	Hourly Rate
Stephen	\$75/hr
Alycia	\$135/hr
Larry	\$150/hr

The shop also charges a design fee for custom tattoos, which varies depending on how complicated and detailed the piece is. Look back at the lesson for examples of how much a design fee might be.

Which of these artists would be your first choice? Your second? Use the space below to estimate how much your tattoo would cost with your first and second choices. Don't forget to factor in a tip for your artist!

Why did you choose the artist you did?

Based on what you make in a month (use your out-of-jail income if you're incarcerated), how long do you think it would take you to save up for this tattoo?

Writing break:

How important is cost to you in choosing a tattoo artist? What other factors are important?
