

Tattoo Artist interview questions

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What to expect

Tattoo artist interviews are usually run by a studio owner or senior artist and lean heavily on your portfolio rather than a formal CV. Expect a mix of conversation about your style and process, direct questions on hygiene and safety, and sometimes a practical trial or guest spot before any offer is made.

- **Technical/process:** How you actually set up, sterilise and run a session, since this is checked closely in an unregulated-feeling but health-regulated trade.
- **Safety and hygiene:** Cross-contamination control, sharps handling and compliance with skin penetration health regulations.
- **Client-facing:** How you manage consultations, indecisive clients and pain or discomfort during a session.
- **Behavioural:** Past situations involving difficult clients, design disagreements or ethical calls on what to tattoo.
- **Business/practical:** How you handle bookings, deposits and working alongside other artists in a shared studio space.

Interviews typically open with a portfolio walkthrough and questions about your influences and specialties, move into hygiene and safety questions, then cover client-handling scenarios. Many studios finish by discussing a trial period or guest spot before committing to ongoing chair space.

1. Walk me through exactly how you set up your station before a client arrives.

Why they ask

This checks whether your infection-control habits are built into your workflow, not just something you can describe in theory.

How to structure your answer

Step-by-step process walkthrough: describe the sequence from equipment selection through to sterilisation checks, in the order you'd actually do it.

Example answer

"I start by pulling fresh, single-use needles and disposable tubes from sealed packaging in front of the client, then run my reusable equipment through the autoclave cycle the day before and log it. I set up ink caps, gloves and barrier film fresh for each client, wipe down the chair and surfaces with hospital-grade disinfectant, and only open sterile packaging once the client is seated. I check my autoclave's indicator strip every cycle and keep a log, because that's what a health inspector will ask for first."

2. Tell me about a time a client asked for something you weren't comfortable tattooing, whether for artistic, placement or health reasons.

Why they ask

Studios need artists who can say no professionally without losing the client relationship or creating a safety issue.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"A client once wanted a detailed piece placed directly over an area with a lot of scar tissue from a prior injury. My task was to explain why the skin wouldn't hold ink evenly there without either refusing outright or losing the booking. I walked them through how scar tissue affects healing and ink retention, sketched an alternative placement that kept their concept intact, and offered a smaller test area first. They went with the adjusted placement, the tattoo healed cleanly, and they've come back for two more pieces since."

3. A client is halfway through a long session and is clearly struggling with the pain. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure and whether you prioritise the client's wellbeing over finishing the piece in one sitting.

How to structure your answer

Judgement-under-pressure: read the situation, communicate options clearly, make a decision, follow up afterwards.

Example answer

"I stop and check in directly rather than pushing through, because a client who's tensing up is also harder to work on cleanly. I'll offer a break, water, and a realistic read on how much is left. If they're done for the day, I stop at a natural point in the linework or shading rather than mid-line, book a follow-up session, and note where we left off so the next sitting starts smoothly. Finishing the tattoo well matters more than finishing it fast."

4. How do you prevent cross-contamination between clients over the course of a day with back-to-back bookings?

Why they ask

This is a direct safety and compliance question studios ask because breaches here can shut a business down.

How to structure your answer

Technical checklist: list controls in the order they apply across a session and between sessions.

Example answer

"Everything that touches broken skin is either single-use or goes through the autoclave before reuse, no exceptions even under time pressure. I change gloves at defined points, never touch my phone or door handles with gloves on, and use barrier film on machines and clip cords. Between clients I fully strip and re-set the station rather than just wiping it down, and any ink that's been dispensed into a cap gets binned at the end of that session, never reused."

5. How do you handle a client who comes in without a clear idea of what they want?

Why they ask

A large part of the job is guiding vague briefs into a workable design, and studios want to see you can do this without frustrating the client.

How to structure your answer

Client-facing approach: rapport building, questioning technique, and how you narrow options down to a concrete design.

Example answer

"I ask about what they're drawn to visually rather than starting with 'what tattoo do you want', so we talk about colours, existing tattoos, and reference images they like even if they're not tattoo-specific. From there I sketch two or three rough directions instead of one polished design, so they can react to something concrete rather than a blank page. Most people know what they don't like faster than what

they do, so that back-and-forth usually gets us to a design within one or two consultations.”

6. How do you manage your bookings, deposits and no-shows?

Why they ask

Many tattoo artists effectively run their own small business within a studio, so this checks practical business sense alongside the artistic skill.

How to structure your answer

Business/practical reasoning: explain your system and the reasoning behind each part of it.

Example answer

“I take a non-refundable deposit at booking that comes off the final price, which cuts down on no-shows for custom pieces that take real time to design. I confirm appointments a day or two out by message, and if someone's a repeat no-show I ask for full payment upfront before booking again. For custom work I build design time into the quote separately from the tattooing itself, so I'm not absorbing hours of unpaid sketching if a client changes their mind partway through.”