



How to Become a Licensed Tattoo Artist in Missouri

(Without Scrubbing Floors)

The Complete Apprenticeship Roadmap — State Requirements, What Programs Won't Tell You, and How to Choose a Training Pathway That Actually Prepares You to Work.

learntoink.com · Kansas City, Missouri

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nick Young is a Missouri-licensed tattoo artist and body piercer with over 15 years of experience in the industry. A Kansas City native, Nick built his career from the ground up — working in shops, running his own studio, and developing one of the most structured state-compliant apprenticeship programs in Missouri.

He created Learn to Ink because he watched too many aspiring artists get exploited, underprepared, or flat-out misled by the traditional apprenticeship model. This guide is the resource he wishes had existed when he was starting out.

Nick holds Missouri Tattoo Artist License #2014042818 and operates Learn to Ink from Kansas City, Missouri.

This guide is for educational purposes. It is not legal advice. State licensing requirements are subject to change — always verify current requirements directly with the Missouri Division of Professional Registration.

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INTRODUCTION

Most People Who Want to Tattoo Never Make It.

Here's Why.

There is a real gap between wanting to tattoo professionally and actually becoming licensed to do it. That gap is where most people stall out — not because they lack talent, and not because they lack drive. They stall out because nobody gave them the real map.

They walked into a traditional shop apprenticeship and spent months cleaning, watching, and waiting. They signed informal agreements with no structure, no curriculum, and no guarantee. They bought their own equipment, took their own risks, and got paid nothing while someone else benefited from their presence.

Or they found an online program that handed them a PDF and called it training.

Neither of those is what this guide is about.

Missouri requires a structured apprenticeship before you can apply for your Tattooist License. But the state doesn't tell you what a good apprenticeship looks like. That's what this guide is for.

By the time you finish reading this, you will understand exactly what Missouri law requires, what separates a serious training program from a waste of your time, what questions to ask before you commit to any program, and what a real path to licensure looks like — start to finish.

You will also leave with a clear understanding of what Learn to Ink offers and why we built it the way we did. We're not hiding that. This guide exists because we believe informed people make better decisions — and the decision to invest in your training is one of the most important ones you'll make in your career.

What's included in this guide:

- ◆ **Chapter 1** — What Missouri Actually Requires
- ◆ **Chapter 2** — The Old-School Apprenticeship Problem
- ◆ **Chapter 3** — What a Real Apprenticeship Looks Like
- ◆ **Chapter 4** — Ten Questions to Ask Before You Sign Anything
- ◆ **Chapter 5** — The Financial Reality of Becoming a Tattoo Artist
- ◆ **Chapter 6** — Your Next Step

CHAPTER 1

What Missouri Actually Requires

The Law Is Specific. Your Path Should Be Too.

Before you can apply for a Missouri Tattooist License, you must complete a documented apprenticeship under a licensed tattoo artist. That is not optional. That is the law.

Missouri regulates tattooing and body piercing under **20 CSR 2267**, administered by the **Missouri Division of Professional Registration**. Here is what that regulation actually requires — in plain language, without the legal fog.

The Core Requirements

- You must train under a licensed Missouri tattoo artist who agrees to serve as your sponsor.
- Your training must include documented hours that meet state minimums.
- You must maintain accurate records of your training hours throughout the process.
- Upon completing your apprenticeship, you submit a formal application to the state for your Tattooist License.

That is what the state requires at minimum. It does not specify curriculum. It does not require you to pass an exam. It does not mandate that your sponsor teach you anything beyond the baseline.

Which is exactly why the quality of apprenticeship programs varies so wildly — and why choosing the right one matters more than most people realize.

What Learn to Ink Requires (Above State Minimum)

At Learn to Ink, we hold our apprentices to a higher standard than the state does — because state minimum compliance does not equal career readiness.

Before any LTI apprentice ever works on a real client, they must:

1. Complete **100 in-depth online lessons** organized across **10 structured modules** covering everything from skin science and safety to technique, equipment, client communication, and business fundamentals.
2. Pass a comprehensive internal written examination with a **minimum score of 80%**. There is no workaround. You pass, or you keep preparing until you do.
3. Only after passing that exam do you advance to **50 supervised in-studio procedures** on real clients — the hands-on phase where your skills get tested under actual conditions.
4. Upon successful completion, you become eligible to apply for your **Missouri Tattooist License**.

Missouri doesn't require you to prove you know anything before licensing you. We do. Because knowing how to fill out an application and knowing how to tattoo are two completely different things.

This is not gatekeeping. It is quality control — for you, for your future clients, and for the industry. The 80% exam threshold exists because we are not in the business of putting underprepared artists in front of real people. And neither should you be.

CHAPTER 2

The Old-School Apprenticeship Problem

Cleaning Toilets Doesn't Teach You to Tattoo.

Let's be direct about how traditional tattoo apprenticeships actually work, because the reality is very different from what most people expect when they walk in the door.

What Most Apprenticeships Actually Look Like

In the traditional model, you approach a working artist — usually someone who owns or runs a shop — and ask to apprentice under them. If they say yes, here is what typically happens:

- You show up, often without pay, and work shop hours doing whatever needs doing — cleaning, answering phones, running errands, prepping stations for other artists.
- You watch. You observe. You wait for permission to practice, and the timeline is entirely at the sponsor's discretion.
- There is no written curriculum. There is no structured progression. There is no exam. There is no defined endpoint.
- You supply your own equipment — often spending \$500 to \$2,000 or more before you've tattooed a single person.
- You bring in clients and generate revenue, but your commission arrangement — if one exists at all — may not start until well into the process, if ever.

The shop benefits from your labor and your client list. You benefit from proximity and observation — if the artist is generous with their time.

Some traditional apprenticeships are excellent. The artist is dedicated, the structure is real, and the training is legitimate. But that is the exception, not the rule. And there is no reliable way to know which kind you are walking into until you are already in it.

Why Most Apprentices Quit

The numbers tell the story. The majority of people who start traditional apprenticeships do not finish them. Not because tattooing is too hard, but because the environment is not designed for success. It is designed for attrition.

When there is no structure, no timeline, and no clear measure of progress, motivation erodes. When there is no pay, financial pressure builds. When there is no contract, the whole arrangement can evaporate without warning — the sponsor moves, the shop closes, the relationship sours.

You lose months or years. And you have nothing to show for it that the state will recognize.

What You Are Legally Owed

This is where most aspiring artists are completely in the dark.

You are not legally required to work for free. You are not legally required to clean a shop in exchange for training. A legitimate apprenticeship is a structured training relationship — not an informal labor arrangement with occasional tattooing thrown in.

A proper apprenticeship agreement should be written, signed, and specific. It should define the duration, the compensation structure, the training expectations, and the responsibilities of both parties. It should be executed before your apprenticeship begins — not after you've already invested months of your time.

Red flags to watch for when evaluating any program or sponsor:

- No written agreement
- No defined curriculum or lesson structure
- No compensation arrangement from day one
- Vague or non-existent timeline to licensure
- Requirement to supply all your own equipment at your own expense
- No documented hour logging system
- No clarity on what happens if the sponsor closes or relocates

Any one of these is a warning. Multiple together is a clear signal that you are being set up for exploitation, not development.

CHAPTER 3

What a Real Apprenticeship Looks Like

Structure, Supervision, and Getting Paid From Day One.

A real apprenticeship is not a favor someone does for you. It is a structured training system designed to produce a competent, licensed, working professional. The best programs do not leave your development to chance.

A Structured Training Pathway — The LTI Model

At Learn to Ink, the program is divided into two clear phases. Each phase has defined requirements, measurable milestones, and a logical sequence that builds your skills systematically rather than randomly.

PHASE ONE — Knowledge and Foundations

- 100 comprehensive online lessons
- 10 structured modules: skin science, sanitation, bloodborne pathogens, equipment, needle selection, color theory, line work, shading, client consultation, aftercare, professional conduct, and business fundamentals
- Internal written exam — 80% passing grade required
- No client work until Phase One is complete

PHASE TWO — Supervised In-Studio Procedures

- 50 supervised procedures on real clients
- Progressive skill development — complexity increases as competency is demonstrated
- Hour logging documented throughout, in compliance with Missouri state requirements
- Upon completion: eligible to apply for Missouri Tattooist License

Getting Paid From Day One

This is one of the most important differentiators in the Learn to Ink program, and it is non-negotiable:

*Apprentices earn **60%** of every tattoo they perform from the first client they touch. The shop takes **40%**. That is the arrangement from day one — not after you prove yourself, not after six months, not someday. **Day one.***

Most programs, when they compensate at all, start apprentices at a fraction of what working artists earn — or defer compensation entirely until some undefined point in the future. We built LTI around the opposite philosophy: if you are doing the work, you deserve to be paid for it.

A 60/40 split in the apprentice's favor communicates something important — it communicates that we treat you as a developing professional from the moment you enter this program. Not a shop hand. Not a student in the academic sense. A working artist in development.

Everything You Need. Included. Yours to Keep.

When you enroll in Learn to Ink, you do not show up and figure out what you're missing. Every supply and piece of professional equipment required to complete your apprenticeship is provided as part of the program.

You train with the tools. You learn them. You develop your technique with them. And when you earn your license and walk out the door, all of it goes with you. Your setup. Your kit. Yours.

Most artists spend hundreds to several thousand dollars building a starter kit after training. That cost is already accounted for in the LTI program. You are not just buying education. You are buying a complete launch into your career.

Program Milestones

End of Module 2

Understand bloodborne pathogen protocols, proper sanitation procedures, setup and breakdown of a sterile workstation, and the anatomy of the skin as it relates to tattooing.

End of Module 5

Understand machine mechanics, needle types and their applications, ink selection, and the fundamentals of line control, saturation, and shading technique — before touching a client.

After Passing the Written Exam

Move into Phase Two with a knowledge base that most traditional apprentices never develop — and begin supervised client work on day one of Phase Two.

End of Phase Two (50 Procedures)

You are ready — technically, legally, and practically — to apply for your Missouri Tattooist License, continue building your client base, and step into your career as a working artist.

CHAPTER 4

Ten Questions to Ask Before You Sign Anything

Evaluate Any Program Honestly. Here's How.

Whether you are considering Learn to Ink or any other program or sponsor relationship, these ten questions should be answered before you commit a single dollar or a single hour. A legitimate program will have real answers. A weak one will either dodge these questions or make you feel like you're asking too much for asking them at all.

You are not asking too much. These are the right questions.

1. Is the supervising artist currently licensed by the state of Missouri?

This is not optional. Your apprenticeship must be conducted under a licensed artist for it to count toward state licensure. Ask to see the license. A legitimate artist will have no problem showing you.

2. Is there a written curriculum you can review before enrolling?

If there is no curriculum to show you, there is no real program — just an informal arrangement with a loose promise attached to it. You should be able to see the structure of what you will learn, in what order, and toward what outcome.

3. Will you tattoo real clients during your apprenticeship?

Hands-on supervised practice is the only way to develop real technique. Any program that keeps you practicing only on fake skin for months on end is not preparing you for the actual job. Real clients, under proper supervision, are a non-negotiable component of real training.

4. What does your commission structure look like from day one?

If you are generating revenue — which you will be when you start tattooing clients — you should be compensated for it. Ask specifically: what percentage do you earn, and when does it start? "We'll figure it out" is not an answer.

5. How many hours per week are expected, and what does a typical week look like?

Your time has value. Know what you are committing to before you commit to it. Vague answers here often mean unpredictable expectations later.

6. Is there a written, signed apprenticeship agreement?

If it is not in writing, it does not exist. A legitimate program will have a contract that defines the relationship, the expectations, the compensation, and the timeline — and will execute it properly before your training begins. At Learn to Ink, all agreements are notarized.

7. What happens if the sponsor closes, relocates, or the relationship ends before you complete the program?

This is the question most people never think to ask — until it happens to them. Know the answer in advance.

8. How are hours documented and submitted?

Missouri requires documented training hours. If there is no logging system in place, you have no verifiable record of your work. Ask to see how hours are tracked and who maintains the records.

9. What is the total investment required — including equipment, supplies, and any additional fees?

Get the full number. Not just tuition. Ask about equipment, supplies, administrative fees, and any other costs. A program that buries costs in the fine print is telling you something about how they operate.

10. What does the program's track record look like? Do graduates become licensed working artists?

Ask for outcomes. Not testimonials — outcomes. How many people have completed this program? How many are currently licensed? Where are they working? A program that cannot answer these questions has not produced results worth talking about.

Learn to Ink answers yes to every single one of these questions. We built the program around them.

CHAPTER 5

The Financial Reality of Becoming a Tattoo Artist

What It Actually Costs. What You Should Expect to Earn.

Most people considering a tattoo career get the financial picture completely backward. They focus on the cost of training and underestimate the cost of not training properly. Let's correct that.

The Investment

A full Learn to Ink apprenticeship is an **\$8,900 investment**.

That number covers your entire 100-lesson online curriculum, your 10-module structured education, your internal written examination, your supervised in-studio procedures on real clients, all required supplies and equipment — which go home with you after licensure — and the direct oversight of a licensed Missouri tattoo artist throughout the entire process.

That is a complete, turnkey launch into a licensed career. Not a PDF and a handshake. Not a six-month grind cleaning stations for someone else. A structured system with a defined endpoint and everything you need to execute.

What's Included in Your \$8,900

100-lesson online curriculum (10 structured modules)	✓
Internal written examination	✓
50 supervised in-studio procedures on real clients	✓
All professional supplies and equipment	✓
Equipment goes home with you after licensure	✓
Direct oversight by a licensed Missouri tattoo artist	✓
In-house financing available — no credit checks	✓

In-House Financing That Actually Works

\$8,900 is real money. We know that. Which is why we do not send you to a bank, a lender, or a financing company that does not care whether you become a licensed artist.

Learn to Ink offers in-house payment arrangements with terms designed around your actual situation. No third-party approvals. No credit checks standing between you and your career. We work directly with you to create a structure that keeps you moving through the program without financial roadblocks.

Every financing arrangement is executed as a fully guaranteed contract — signed and notarized with all parties present. That protects you. It protects us. And it means everything agreed to is documented, binding, and clear before your first lesson.

The agreement is simple: You pay. You do the work. You keep advancing. You earn your license.

The Timeline

On average, Learn to Ink apprentices complete the full program in **90 to 120 days**.

That is less than four months from enrollment to Missouri Tattooist License eligibility — with real client hours logged, professional equipment in hand, and a 60/40 commission arrangement that has been paying you throughout Phase Two.

Compare that to a traditional apprenticeship with no timeline, no defined endpoint, and no guarantee of what you walk away with. The math is not close.

What You Should Expect to Earn

Earning Potential — Missouri Tattoo Artists	
Entry-level (Year 1)	\$30,000 – \$55,000
Established artist (Years 2–3)	\$55,000 – \$75,000
Disciplined professional (Years 3–5+)	\$75,000 – \$100,000+
During LTI Phase Two (60/40 commission)	Real income from first client

During your Phase Two training at LTI, you are already generating real income on the 60/40 structure. You are not waiting to get paid. You are not starting from zero after graduation. By the time you are licensed, you have real hours, real clients, real experience — and real earnings already on the board.

The Cost of Doing It Wrong

Operating without a license in Missouri is illegal and carries real consequences — fines, cease and desist orders, and permanent damage to your professional reputation before you even get started. Beyond legality, working without proper training puts clients at genuine risk.

The cost of a legitimate program is not just tuition. It is protection — for you, for your clients, and for the career you are trying to build.

CHAPTER 6

Your Next Step

When You're Ready to Do This the Right Way.

You have the map now. You know what Missouri requires. You know what separates a real program from a waste of your time. You know the questions to ask, the numbers to expect, and the timeline that is actually possible.

The only thing left is the decision.

What Learn to Ink Offers

◆ State-compliant apprenticeship	aligned to Missouri 20 CSR 2267
◆ 100 in-depth online lessons	across 10 structured modules
◆ Internal written exam	80% required to advance to in-studio work
◆ 50 supervised in-studio procedures	on real clients
◆ 60/40 commission in your favor	from the first client you tattoo
◆ All professional supplies and equipment included	yours to keep after licensure
◆ In-house financing with notarized contracts	no banks, no credit checks
◆ 90–120 day average completion	licensed and working in less than four months
◆ Direct oversight by a licensed Missouri tattoo artist	throughout the entire program

Learn to Ink was built on one belief: if you are serious about tattooing, you deserve training that is serious about you. Not a shop's free labor pool. Not an online course that gives you a certificate and no real skills. A structured, documented, supervised pathway from aspiring artist to licensed professional.

We built the program we wished existed. Every system, every lesson, every contract, every policy was designed around producing working artists — not collecting tuition.

If you are ready to do this the right way, we want to hear from you.

Apply at learntoink.com

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STATE LICENSED TRAINING PATHWAY

"Built different. Licensed to prove it."

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