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tat·too¹  (tă-t)

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n. pl. tat·toos

1. A signal sounded on a drum or bugle to summon soldiers or sailors to their quarters at night.
2. A display of military exercises and music offered as evening entertainment.
3. A continuous, even drumming or rapping.

v. tat·tooed, tat·too·ing, tat·toos

v.intr.

To beat out an even rhythm, as with the fingers.

v.tr.

To beat or tap rhythmically on; rap or drum on.

[Alteration of Dutch *taptoe*, tap-shut (closing time for taverns), tattoo : *tap*, spigot, tap (from Middle Dutch *tappe*) + *toe*, shut (from Middle Dutch; see **de-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#)).]

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tat·too²  (tă-t)

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n. pl. tat·toos

1. A permanent mark or design made on the skin by a process of pricking and ingraining an indelible pigment or by raising scars.
2. A design made on the skin with a temporary dye such as henna or ink.

tr.v. tat·tooed, tat·too·ing, tat·toos

1. To mark (the skin) with a tattoo.
2. To form (a tattoo) on the skin.

[From Tahitian *tatau* and kindred Polynesian words, all from Proto-Polynesian **tatau*.]

tat·too *er n.*

tat·too *ist n.*

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Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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