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gaunt·let¹ also **gant·let**  (gônt līt, gänt -)

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n.

1. A protective glove, usually extending over some of the forearm, worn as part of medieval armor.
2. Any of various protective gloves, usually with an extended or flared cuff, as used in certain sports such as fencing and motorcycle riding, in cooking to handle hot objects, and other activities.
3. A challenge: *throw down the gauntlet; take up the gauntlet.*
4. A dress glove cuffed above the wrist.

[Middle English, from Old French *gantelet*, diminutive of *gant*, glove, from Frankish **want*.]



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gauntlet1

late 16th-century English

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gaunt·let² also **gant·let**  (gônt līt, gänt -)

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n.

1.

- a. A form of punishment or torture in which people armed with sticks or other weapons arrange themselves in two lines facing each other and beat the person forced to run between them.
- b. The lines of people so arranged.

2.

- a. An arrangement of two lines of menacing or demanding people or things through which one must pass: *moved through a gauntlet of shouting reporters.*
- b. A series of difficult or trying experiences: *survived the gauntlet of adolescent humiliations.*

[Alteration (influenced by [GAUNTLET](#)¹) of *gantlope*, from Swedish *gatlopp* : *gata*, lane (from Old Norse; see [ghē- in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#)) + *lopp*, course, running (from Middle Low German *lōp*).]

Word History: The two words spelled *gauntlet* may share associations with medieval violence, but they have separate origins. The word *gauntlet* used in the idiom *to throw down the gauntlet* comes from the Old French word *gantelet*, a diminutive of *gant*, "glove." (The idiom makes reference to the medieval custom of throwing down a glove in challenging an adversary to combat.) The *gauntlet* used in *to run the gauntlet* is an alteration of the earlier English form *gantlope*, which came from the Swedish word *gatlopp*, a compound of *gata*, "lane," and *lopp*, "course," a word related to *lope* and *leap*. The Swedish word for this traditional form of punishment, in which two lines of people beat a person forced to run between them, probably became known to English speakers as a result of the Thirty Years' War. Sweden played a leading role in the coalition of Protestant countries that fought against Spain and the Holy Roman Empire, and at the end of the war, in 1648, the Swedish empire emerged as a great power of Europe. It was during this period of expanding Swedish influence that *gatlopp* entered English. It seems, however, that from the moment English

speakers borrowed the word, they inserted an *n* into the pronunciation of *gatlopp*—in the earliest known attestation of the word in English, dating from 1646, it is spelled *gantelope*. The English word was then influenced by the spelling of the other *gauntlet*, "a protective glove," eventually leading to the identical spellings used today.

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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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