

Elements of Art

The seven building blocks every artist uses to create visual work

LINE	A mark with length and direction. The most basic element of drawing. <i>Horizontal = calm · Vertical = strength · Diagonal = movement · Curved = grace</i>
SHAPE	A two-dimensional area defined by edges. Geometric (made with rules) or organic (freeform). <i>Circle = infinite · Square = stable · Triangle = energetic · Organic = natural</i>
FORM	A three-dimensional object (or its illusion in 2D). Has height, width, AND depth. <i>Sphere, cube, cylinder, cone — all forms have highlight, shadow, and cast shadow</i>
SPACE	The area around, between, or within objects. Positive space = objects. Negative space = background. <i>Overlapping · Size difference · Atmospheric perspective · Placement on page</i>
COLOR	Light reflected off surfaces. Defined by hue (name), value (light/dark), and intensity (bright/dull). <i>Primary: Red, Yellow, Blue · Secondary: Orange, Green, Violet · Tertiary: mixes</i>
VALUE	The lightness or darkness of a color or gray tone. The most important element for creating the illusion of form. <i>Tint = color + white · Shade = color + black · Tone = color + gray</i>
TEXTURE	The surface quality — rough, smooth, bumpy, silky. Can be actual (touchable) or implied (drawn illusion). <i>Actual texture: collage, impasto paint · Implied texture: cross-hatching, stippling, blending</i>

Teacher Tip: Introduce one element per class session. Ask students to find that element in three different artworks before they make their own. The vocabulary sticks when it is discovered, not just defined.