The Elements of Art
The elements of art are the visual components in an image. They are real things that can be seen and photographed. Think of them as the raw material that you will organize or compose in an image.

Line
In photography, a line is one of the most fundamental art elements. In basic terms, a line is a point moving in space. The line starts in one place and ends somewhere else. It can be real—a yellow line on a road—or implied—geese flying in a “V”. It can be a walkway or a fence running through your picture. It could be several balls lying on a field. A line can be thick or thin, or in between, and it can change direction as it moves. For our purposes, there are five kinds of lines: straight, curved, horizontal, vertical, and combination. This last one, combination, borrows two or more of the other four qualities.

Shape and Form
A shape is created when a line meets itself. A shape can be either geometric or organic. Circles, ovals, triangles, rectangles, and squares are examples of geometric shapes. You can see these shapes in everyday objects like wheels, road signs, and windows. Buildings and machines are frequently a combination of these geometric shapes.

Organic shapes are more natural. Flowing curves and random outlines are common features of organic shapes. Picture a leaf, a puddle, the silhouette of a face, and a wet footprint on concrete, or imagine clouds drifting on the wind or a shadow of a flying bird. These are all organic shapes. Like lines, shapes can be real or implied. Groups of people can form a triangle. A group of soccer players in a huddle looks like a circle.

Form is similar to shape, but while shape is flat and two-dimensional, form has volume and is three-dimensional. The visual elements or subjects in your photography are shapes and forms. When you take a photograph, you turn three-dimensional forms into two-dimensional shapes.

Color
Just as oil or watercolor is a painter’s medium, light is a photographer’s medium, and when you talk about color in photography, you are always talking about light. There are three qualities or characteristics that apply to all colors. The first, hue, is the name of a color like green, blue, or yellow. This is related to the spectrum, or rainbow, of colors that are found in white light.

The second quality, saturation, is the intensity or purity of a color. For instance, a fully saturated red will be made up of only the color red with absolutely no amounts of green, blue, or any other colors. When other colors are present within a dominant color, the color will appear less saturated. It will look less rich and more pastel.

The third quality, value, refers to the lightness or darkness of a color. In painting, color values are created by adding white to lighten a color, or adding black to darken it. Light, however, behaves differently than paint. In the real world and in photography, value is created by the amount of light and the range of tones, or light and dark areas, in a scene. Some objects are lighter in value than other objects. Some are darker. All are affected by the amount of available light.

Value
Value refers to the quality of light and dark, both in terms of color and shades of gray, in a composition. This is an especially important part of photography because photography is the medium of light. When you capture an image, you are recording the light and dark tones in a scene. You are photographing how much light is reflected back at the camera and how much light is absorbed by the subject or scene. Light and dark values give you visual clues about the shapes and forms of objects. They tell how near and how far objects in the image are from each other and from the viewer. The values in a scene carry emotional content as well. Low-key, or mostly dark scenes, can create a mood of sadness, suspense or dread. High-key scenes, which are mostly light or white values, usually carry positive, upbeat feelings. Value is also one of the primary indicators of a high-quality print. Ansel Adams and the followers of his photographic style believe that every print should contain small areas of the blackest black and the whitest white. This gives a print maximum visual impact, and carries a powerful sense of drama. Photographers use a full range of values to achieve the illusion of three-dimensionality. This is one characteristic of the very best prints.

**Space**
Looking through your camera’s viewfinder, you see a specific area contained within a frame. In art, that area is called your picture’s space. Space is the two-dimensional arrangement of objects in a photograph. The relative size of different objects in the picture, the result of a shallow or deep depth of field, and the effects of perspective combine to create this sense of physical space and dimension. Space can be positive or negative. Positive space is the subject and negative space is the background. The contrast of light and dark is one way to use positive and negative space.

**Texture**
Most of the elements of art are purely visual, and look and function the same way in real life as they do in a photograph. A line is a line. A shape is a shape. The color blue is still blue. But texture appeals to the sense of touch. More than a visual element, it is a physical sensation and memory. In a photograph, a sense of texture makes our eyes believe that a rusted metal surface feels rough to the touch, or that a polished steel surface is indeed smooth and glasslike. A dew-covered leaf must “feel” cool and wet to the viewer. Texture makes a photograph look real and suggests it is three dimensional, rather than the two-dimensional object that it actually is.