The Color Wheel
This basic map shows relationships among colors. Children learn to mix colors according to this model, and artists use it for working with pigments (oil paint, watercolor, gouache, and so on).

Primary Colors
Red, yellow, and blue are pure; they can't be mixed from other colors. All of the other colors on the wheel are created by mixing primary colors.

Secondary Colors
Orange, purple, and green each consist of two primaries mixed together.

Tertiary Colors
Colors such as red orange and yellow green are mixed from one primary and one secondary color.

Complements
Red/green, blue/orange, and yellow/purple sit opposite each other on the color wheel. For more subtle combinations, choose "near opposites," such as red plus a tertiary green, or a tertiary blue and a tertiary orange.

Analogous Colors
Color schemes built from hues that sit near to each other on the color wheel (analogous colors) have minimal chromatic differences.
Line/Shape Study Vector-based software uses a closed line to define a shape. Here, new lines are formed by the intersection of shapes, creating a swelling form reminiscent of the path of a steel-point pen. Ryan Gladhill, MFA Studio.
Projection Study This idealized landscape uses axonometric projection, in which scale is consistent from the front to back of the image. As seen on a map or computer game, this space implies a disembodied, godlike viewer rather than a physical eye positioned in relation to a horizon. Visakh Menon, MFA Studio.
Figure/Ground Battalion: These marching positive and negative arrows commingle and break away from the pack. The dynamic use of scale, direction, rhythm, and color ushers the viewer's eye in and around the composition. Superforms take shape out of the crowd. Yong Suk Lee, MFA Studio.
Mixing Layers The two compositions shown here were each made from the same set of digital images, layered together to create different designs. Various relationships are built by changing the scale, position, color, or transparency of elements. MFA Studio. Source images: Jason Ohrstrake, photography; Robert Lewis, flying fish.
Graphic Transparency In each of these compositions, a photograph has been overlaid with a field of graphic elements. The graphic layer becomes an abstracted commentary on the image underneath. MFA Studio.