I am currently teaching a class on drawing raptors, as always I have learned so much. Here are some pointers:
* Begin with a VERY accurate contour line drawing, imagine the drawing is accurate enough for it to be handed to someone else for rendering the surface details, with no reference material at hand! Or the drawing can be filed for a long period of time, on returning to it the artist understands every line - no questionable areas.
* Clearly define the general topography of the bird such as: body; crown, nape, scapulars, breast and flank. Tail; upper or undertail coverts, and tail retrices. Wing; mantle median coverts, greater secondary coverts, secondaries, primaries.
* Direction of growth of each and every feather. The viewer will follow the line of least resistance - even if it is just one line in the 'wrong' direction.
* Length of individual feathers and bristles. Do not assume the viewer will know how long a feather, in a certain area, render them accurately.
* Indicate shape of individual feathers ONLY when easily seen. If too much information is rendered, the overall look of the image can be of a carving rather than a painting. Implication is as important as detailed explanation. Do NOT indicate feather individual feather contours unless you can clearly define them. The further the bird is from the viewer the less detail needs to be rendered.
* Be clear as to whether the 'shape' is a feather contour edge, causing a slight shadow due to separation between the upper feather and an underlying feather, or is it pigment pattern on the surface of a single feather. In some instances feathers of certain parts of the body lie very close to the body - separations are not apparent (unless the bird turns its head, causing feathers to separate one from another creating a cast shadow) this is an instance where the pigment pattern ONLY will be rendered. An alternative example: feathers held very close to the body but each individual feather has clearly defined edges, often with slight pigment variation at the contour edge.
* Take note of pigment pattern shapes hard edges or soft blurred edges?
* Take note of pigment pattern values comparative to the 'base' local color.
* Be sure to add the indication of a light source to suggest volume and form.

- To help understand flight postures make the enclosed diagram. Trace onto heavy duty velum tracing paper. Fold in order as numbered. Open as desired to replicate flight posture.