How to Draw a Feather

12 easy steps for beginners



What you'll need

- A pencil
- An eraser
- A black fineliner
- Colored pencils or markers
- Plain paper

How to use this guide

New lines for each step are shown in **blue**; lines you already drew are gray. Draw lightly first, then ink and erase near the end.

Read the full tutorial online →

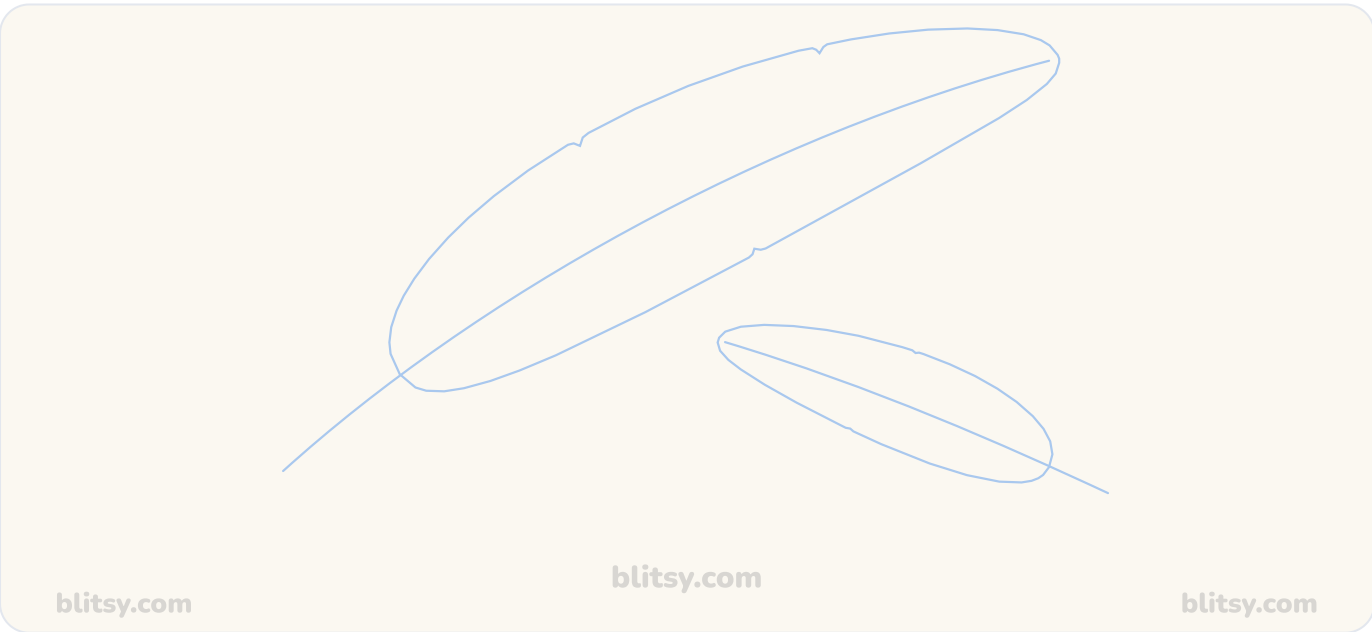
STEP 1 Sketch two curved spine lines



Turn the paper sideways. Draw one long, gently curved line from the lower left corner area up toward the top right, bending slightly like a stretched bow. Below it on the right, add a shorter line that slants the other way. These are the spines of the two feathers, and every later shape hangs from them.

💡 **Tip:** Swing from your elbow, not your wrist, for a smooth curve.

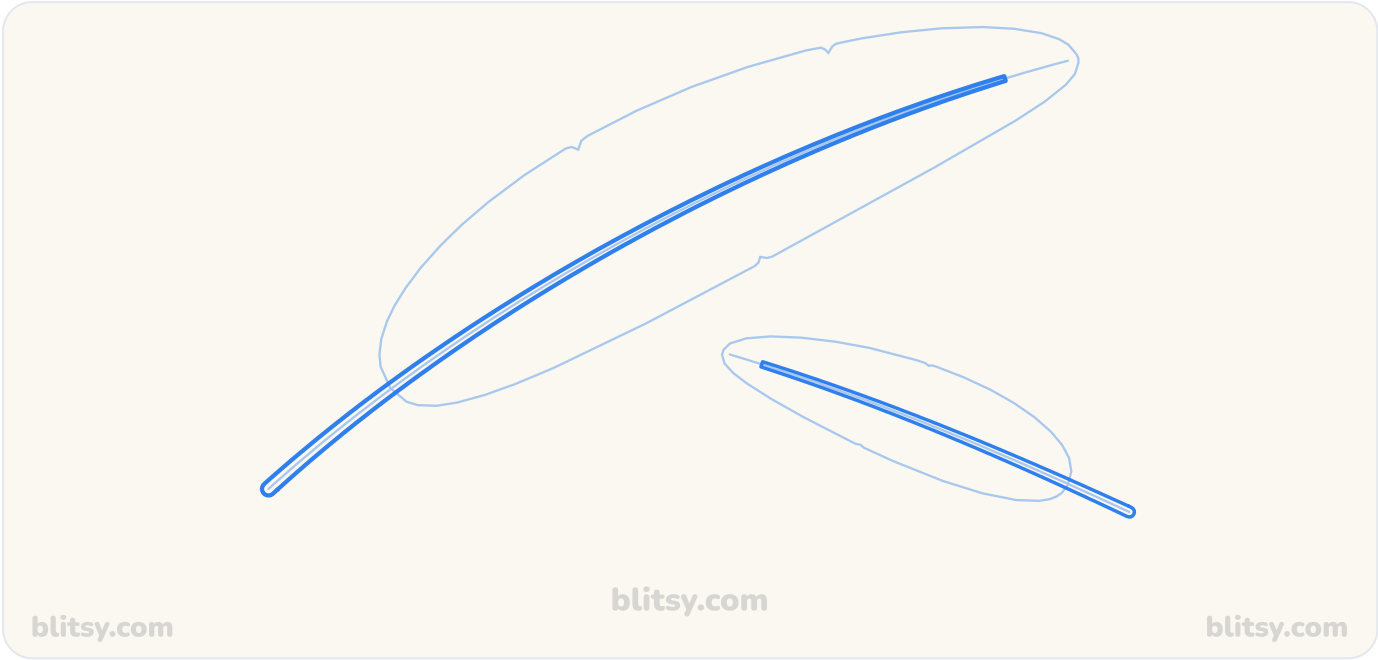
STEP 2 Wrap a leaf shape around each spine



Around the top two thirds of the long line, sketch a long leaf shape that comes to a point near the end of the spine. Make the upper side a bit wider than the lower side. Real flight feathers are lopsided like this, and that small difference is what stops your drawing from looking like a plain leaf. Do the same, smaller, around the short line.

💡 **Tip:** Leave the bottom third of each spine bare. That's where the quill and the fluff go.

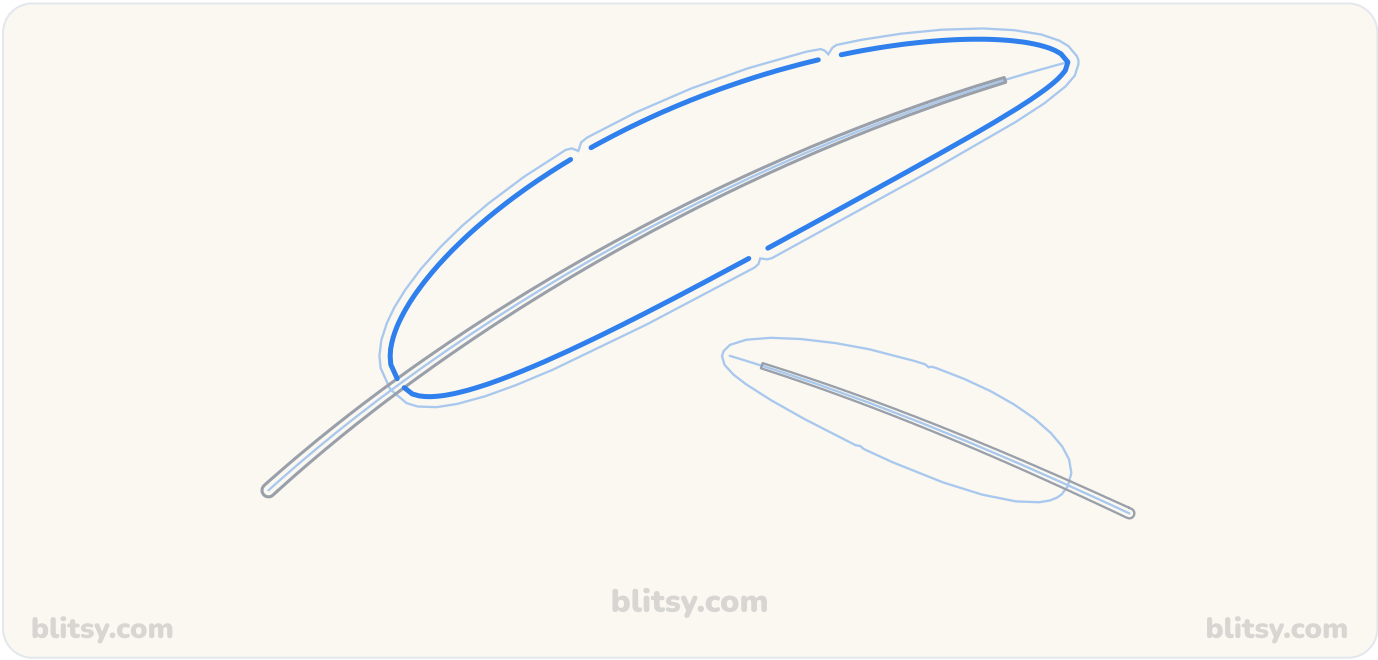
STEP 3 Draw the quill and the shaft



Go over each spine with two close lines to turn it into a thin tube. I make it widest at the bottom, where the quill ends in a small rounded tip, and let the two lines creep closer together as they travel up. Stop the shaft a little before the point of the leaf shape.

💡 **Tip:** If your two shaft lines touch too early, the tip turns into a black stick once you ink it.

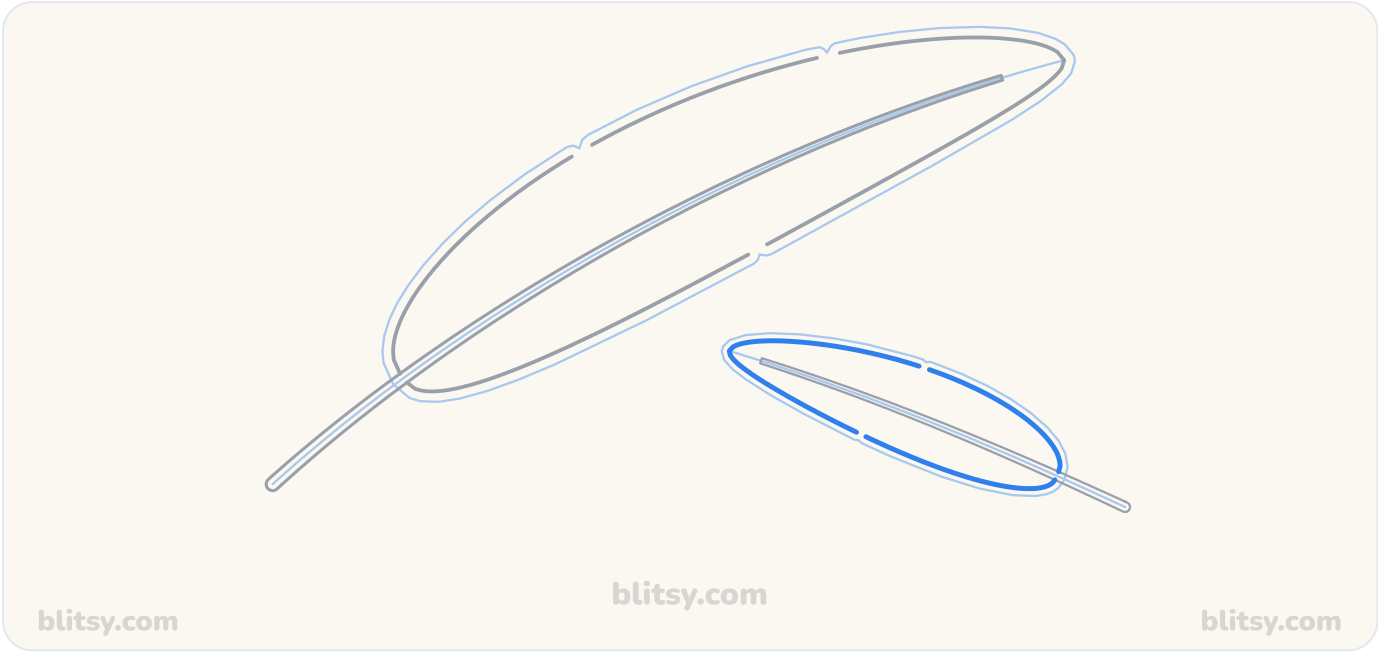
STEP 4 Trace the edges of the big vane



The flat part of a feather is called the vane. Trace over the big leaf guide with a firmer line, starting where it meets the shaft and curving out to the rounded tip. Leave three tiny gaps along the edge, two on the top and one underneath. Those gaps mark where the splits will cut in during step 6.

💡 **Tip:** Draw each side of the vane in one go, from the shaft toward the tip.

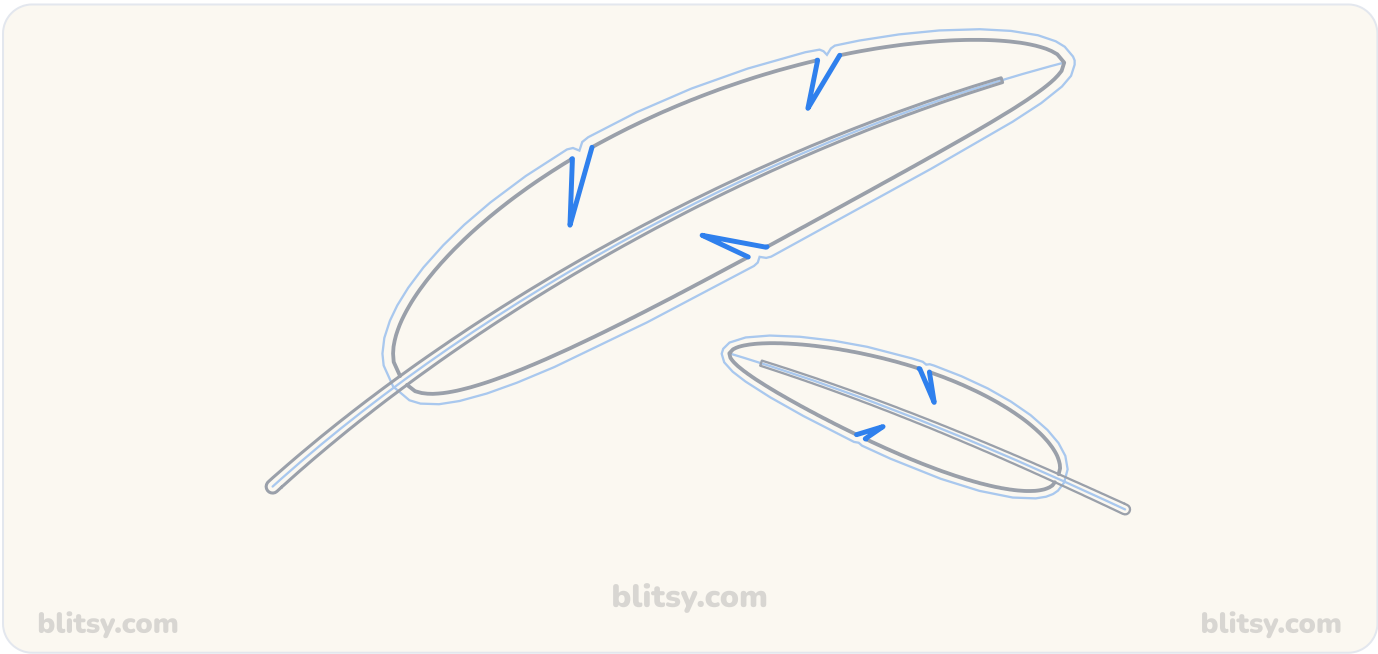
STEP 5 Trace the edges of the small vane



Now outline the small feather the same way. Here the wider side faces up toward the big feather, so the pair looks like it fell from two different birds. Leave two small gaps this time, one on each side. Keep the tip nicely rounded rather than sharp.

💡 **Tip:** Rotate the paper so the small feather points away from your drawing hand.

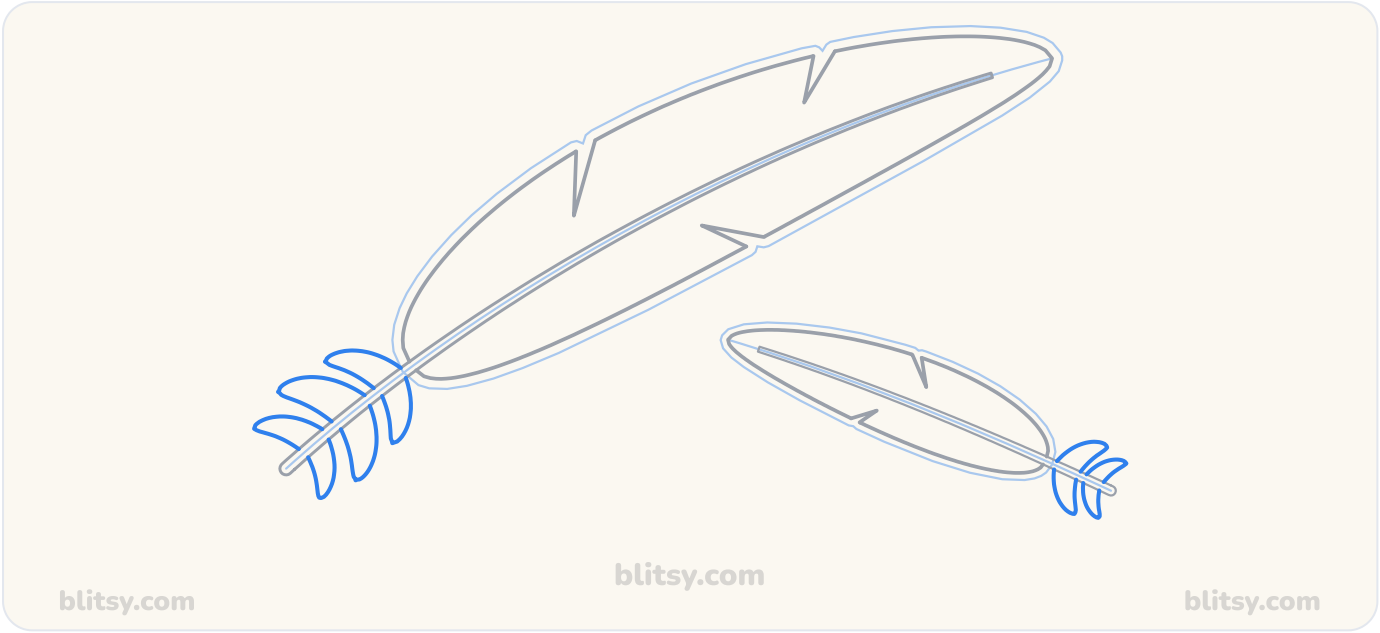
STEP 6 Cut a few splits into the vanes



At each gap, draw a narrow V that points into the vane and leans back toward the quill. Push it about halfway to the shaft, never all the way. This is my favorite step. Splits happen on real feathers when the tiny hooks holding the barbs together let go, and adding just a few makes your drawing look natural instead of cut from plastic.

💡 **Tip:** Three splits on a big feather is plenty. Ten looks like it was chewed.

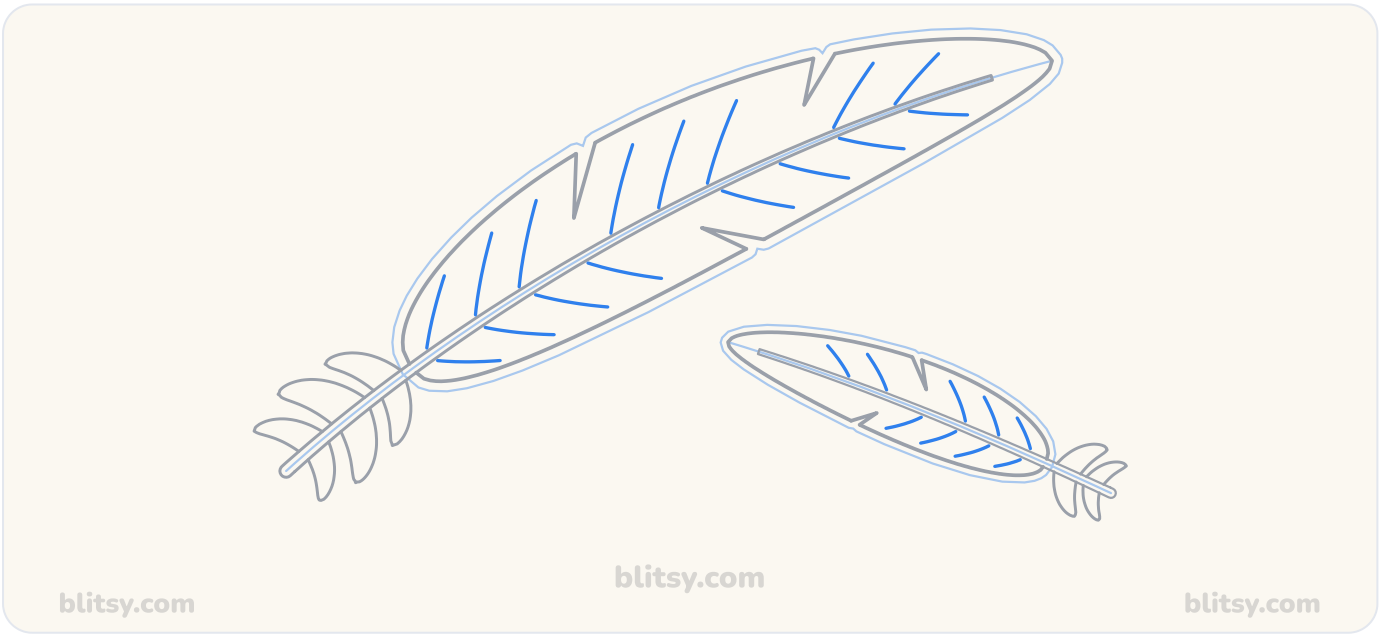
STEP 7 Add fluffy down at the base



Just below each vane, on both sides of the quill, draw a few soft tufts shaped like curved bananas with round ends. Let them sweep back toward the quill tip. This loose fluff is called down, and it grows on most body and flight feathers. Make the tufts uneven in length; identical ones look like a comb.

💡 **Tip:** Keep a light, quick hand on the down so it stays airy.

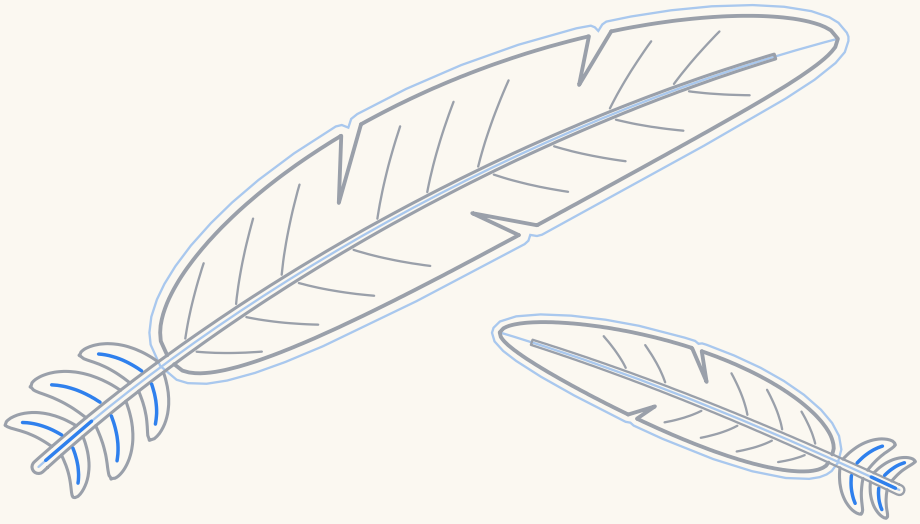
STEP 8 Draw barb lines on one slant



Barbs are the thin strands that make up the vane. Draw a short line from the shaft out toward the edge, slanting forward toward the tip, and stop before it touches the outline. Repeat along both sides, spacing them evenly and skipping the split areas. The one rule I'm strict about: every barb line leans the same way.

💡 **Tip:** Before each barb, glance at the one you drew last and copy its angle.

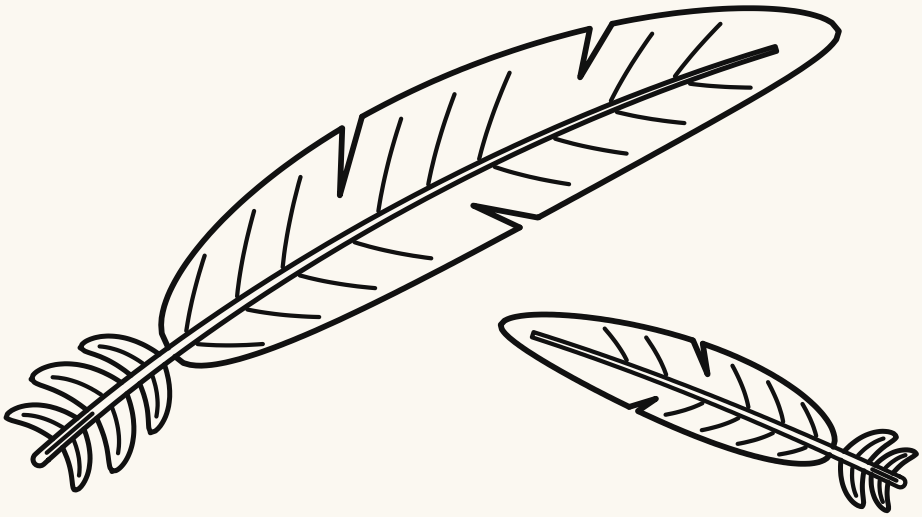
STEP 9 Add wisps and quill lines



Inside each down tuft, draw one thin curved line down its middle. It splits the tuft into strands and makes it look softer. Then add a short line inside the bottom of the big quill, which hints that it's hollow. These lines are small, so use the sharpest part of your pencil.

💡 **Tip:** Stop each wisp line before the end of its tuft so the edge stays soft.

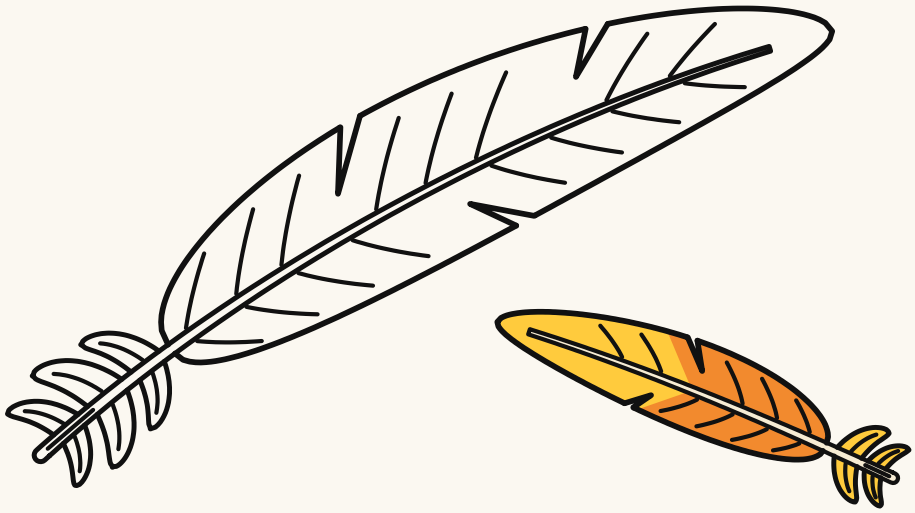
STEP 10 Ink the lines and erase the guides



Trace every line you want to keep with the black pen. My order is shaft, vane edges, splits, down, barbs and wisps. Skip the pale spine curves and leaf guides. Wait a minute for the ink to dry, then erase all the pencil so only the clean black outline stays on the paper.

💡 **Tip:** Ink the long vane edges first, while your hand is still fresh and steady.

STEP 11 Color the small feather



I start with the small feather because it's quicker and warms me up for the big one. Color the base and middle of the vane orange and the tip yellow, with the change in color slanting like the barbs. Use yellow for the fluffy down too, and a soft cream for the shaft.

💡 **Tip:** Color in the same direction as the barbs and the strokes blend right in.

STEP 12 Color the big feather



Fill the wide upper side of the big vane with teal and the narrow lower side with dark teal. That darker side quietly makes the feather look curved. Then go over the base in dark blue and the tip in turquoise, again with slanted edges between the bands. Finish with light aqua down and a cream shaft.

💡 **Tip:** Leave a hair of white between each barb line and the color if you like a crisp look.