May 2022

Global Water Futures (GWF) Science Feature Guide

What are Science Features?

Science Features convey research advancements or areas of active work within the Global Water Futures program in a clear, easy to follow, and insightful way for broad but informed knowledge user audiences. The stories can vary in scope – for instance, they can focus on the learnings from a specific experiment or activity; they can highlight the potential applicability of a project; or they can take a wider perspective on an issue that synthesizes knowledge across a number of individual studies. Science Features tend to gain more traction when they clearly articulate environmental or societal relevance of the research, include clear recommendations, and are connected to an issue of immediate public concern.

Science Features are very concise (1-3 pages), written in the active voice, and include simple and attractive graphics (note that there is central support to help you to develop these graphics if needed). They should include an overview of the problem or challenge, discuss the research approach taken, and describe the potential impact of the research.

This guide is meant to help you get started with the writing process. By answering the following questions, you will generate the content that is needed in your Science Feature. Do not feel constrained by the structure of this guide – we encourage authors to find the best format for the story they are telling (see some examples here: https://gwf.usask.ca/outreach/science-features/).

Benefits of Science Features

Publishing a Science Feature can personally benefit researchers in a number of ways:

- Demonstrate your ability to communicate research in a plain language format that appeals to an audience outside of your discipline. Note this can add another line to your curriculum vitae to demonstrate knowledge mobilization beyond academic audiences.
- Make an impact through your research by sharing your findings with a broad audience, including potential employers, partners, and collaborators. Note that the GWF Communications team promotes the Science Features, which typically generate the highest level of website traffic on the GWF Website and receive thousands of impressions on social media.
- Create connections and future opportunities as you continue with related or ongoing research and advance in your career.

Guiding Questions

1. **Title**

   Think about seeing your story in a newspaper or magazine – what would the title be? Try to come up with a short headline no longer than 10 words. It should be short and catchy and describe the essence of the story you are telling.

2. **Sub-title / story lead**

   A sub-title can include more information, but consider using this text for a lead (i.e. a short, inviting opening sentence or paragraph, summarizing the most important aspects of the story.)

3. **Authors and affiliations**

   List author names, affiliations, and contact information (email) for lead author. Also include information on the GWF project(s) and/or core team(s) that this work falls under.

   Consider having this led by an individual or a small group of authors (up to four) and include a "Meet the Team" section for the broader team with short, non-academic bios and photos (preferably from in the field).

4. **What is the relevance of your work?**

   Describe why your project is necessary and important. Consider the environmental or societal problem(s) you are addressing. Does your research have a hook, such as being connected to an issue being discussed in the media or by government? Perhaps your research helps achieve commitments made by other organizations, such as the Sustainable Development Goal targets, the Paris Agreement, or UNDRIP. Perhaps it helps federal, Indigenous or provincial water management or prediction. Making those links can help the reader better understand the context of your research. Is it relevant to climate change and water, land management and water, ecosystems, water use?

5. **What is new and exciting about your research?**

   Starting from a point of general knowledge, lead your readers along a path to your current research. Use plain language descriptions and include technical terms in brackets (perhaps with a link to a definition or a video). Describe how your research has advanced our understanding or helps to inform an improved response to the challenge. Again, where possible, tie this to environmental and societal challenges, especially those that your intended audience is focused on. Avoid jargon but be informative without overburdening the article with methodological details.

   Consider using boxes or sections for more detailed information or to explain a complex concept, workflow, tool, etc. in more detail. During layout these can be included as a box, tab, expanding text etc. to keep the content and aesthetics appealing for the general public, reduce length, and provide detail for those who are more interested in going deeper into the topic.

6. **What are the potential applications for your research?**

   Is there a specific stakeholder group(s) that will be able to use/be affected by your research? How is your research helping to improve the policies, practices, or processes in the real world?

7. **Are you collaborating with or consulting other colleagues and partners in your research?**

   If applicable, describe what partners are involved, their role, and how knowledge and ideas are exchanged. How does this feed into the application of this research? Where are the collaborations occurring – where in Canada or in the world?

8. **What's next?**

   Conclude with some next steps that you or your team consider to be future directions and priorities, or areas for further work.

9. **Consider different voices**

   Throughout the story, there may be opportunities to include some quotes or personal reflections from the work to add human interest. Are there community or other partner perspectives that can or should be included?

10. **Infographics /illustrations/ graphics**

    Include visually appealing images and self-explanatory infographics /illustrations/ graphics that complement your content. Photographs to show the research in action, the setting/location, the people, or other aspects of the research are particularly impactful. Include descriptive captions. Some basic credits (e.g., for illustrations, photography, etc.) should be included.

    If you need help developing an illustration or infographic, please describe the types of visuals or content you are hoping to illustrate. This could include key facts, quotes or simple concepts.

11. **Links to more detail**

    Science Features do not need to include a high level of detail but it is useful to provide links to peer reviewed articles, news stories, project websites, videos, and other relevant information for readers who want to learn more.