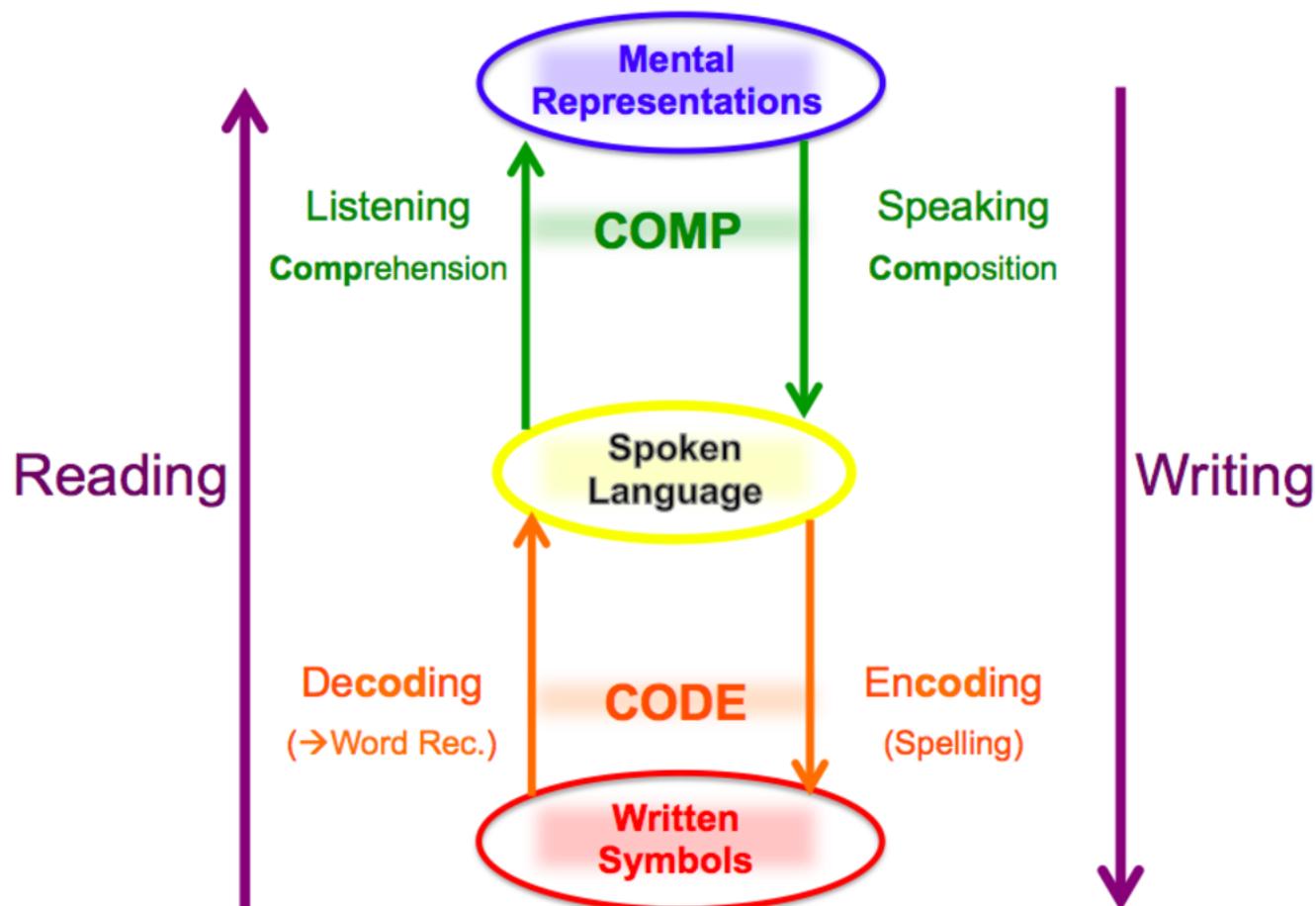


## The Acquisition of Language and Literacy (ALL) Model<sup>©</sup>



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## A Mental Graphic Organizer for Teachers

As mental graphic organizers, schemas are the way we organize information in our minds, our mental filing systems or webs. When teachers try to help their students remember a large amount of information—especially if the students have had little experience with the topic or if it's very complex—teachers might draw out a graphic organizer and plug the relevant bits of information into the relevant parts of the organizer. Because the schema is not just a list but is an organizer, its structure is meaningful and so it can be used to help the students recognize connections: that is, to figure out and remember how one bit of

information is related to other bits of information (such as generations on a family tree), or even to other schemas (such as an in-law's family tree).

Just as schemas help students learn, recall, associate, and analyze information, they can help teachers with one of the most complex topics they need to understand: literacy development. The Acquisition of Language and Literacy (ALL) Model is meant to be a schema for teachers to use when thinking about literacy, simple enough to be easily remembered and used, yet comprehensive enough to be useful in a discussion concerning any aspect of literacy development. It helps teachers analyze their students' literacy strengths and weaknesses and make instructional decisions while teaching or when planning a lesson, a unit, or an entire curriculum.

## Understanding Language & Literacy Connections

In the ALL Model, the circled phrases are the primary components of language and literacy development: **Mental Representations** (meanings or pictures in our minds), **Spoken Language**, and **Written Symbols** (letters, punctuation, organization and spacing of text). The arrows are the connections between these components which show how the components are related to each other. **Reading** and **Writing** are shown as reciprocal skills, as are **Listening Comprehension** and **Speaking Composition**, and **Decoding** and **Encoding**. The skill of Reading is shown on the left-hand side of the model. It involves looking at the Written Symbols on a page, turning them into Spoken Language (at least by activating the speech processing parts of the brain even if not by actually speaking aloud) by Decoding, and then associating that Spoken Language with meaning in order to create a mental picture or Mental Representation of it, which is what we do when engaging in Listening Comprehension. Reading, Decoding and Listening Comprehension are receptive skills.

Conversely, Writing involves first taking a set of Mental Representations—e.g., a series of pictures in our minds or abstract ideas—and turning them into Spoken Language. (This process is termed Spoken Composition in the ALL Model because when people Compose or come up with the words they want to use to describe their Mental Representations, even if they do not actually speak aloud, they still activate the speech processing parts of their brain.) Then, after coming up with these words—with the Spoken Language to describe their Mental Representations—people must Encode the words using Written Symbols (write them down, type them, etc.) in order to complete the process of Writing. Writing, Speaking, and Encoding (spelling) are expressive skills.

Just as we help our students by giving them graphic organizers, let's help ourselves and

our teachers by helping them mentally organize their knowledge of literacy. Happy schema-building!

We first met Dr. Dillon when she was a post-doctoral fellow at Haskins Laboratories. Ever since, she has continued to apply the training she received from Dr. Margie Gillis and Literacy How mentors in her work with students and teachers. Dr. Dillon developed the ALL Model from these “knowledge to practice” experiences. We are excited to share it with you! [Learn more.](#)



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