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Autor: Olson David R.

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What role has writing played in the development of our modern understanding of language, nature and ourselves? In this historical and developmental account, David Olson offers a new perspective on this process. Reversing the traditional assumption about the relation between speech and writing, he argues that writing provides an important model of the way we think about speech; our consciousness of language is structured by our writing system. In addition, writing provides our dominant models for thinking about nature and the mind, and shows how our understanding of the world - our science - and our understanding of ourselves - our psychology - are by-products of our ways of creating and interpreting written texts. This challenging study draws on recent advances in history, anthropology, linguistics and psychology, and will be of interest to readers across the range of these subjects.