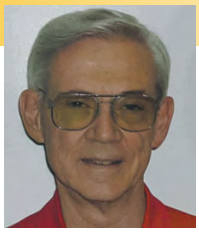
Obituary
Charles Schoff Watson, 1932–2021



Charles Schoff (Chuck) Watson, a Fellow of the Acoustical Society of America, died at age 89 on September 10, 2021, in Bloomington, Indiana. Chuck was a prolific contributor to hearing and communication science over a long, fruitful career, and he remained active in research to the end, receiving his last National Institutes of Health (NIH) research grant shortly before he passed away.

Born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, Chuck went to Indiana University (IU), Bloomington, for his undergraduate and graduate degrees. In 1963, he earned his doctorate in experimental psychology, with James Egan as his advisor. As a graduate student, he collaborated on a seminal study of the effects of intense noise on the mammalian ear with his lifelong friend and colleague James D. Miller.

Chuck took his first academic position at the University of Texas at Austin, where he examined basic issues in psychoacoustics and signal detection theory. At the Central Institute for the Deaf (CID) in St. Louis, Missouri, he created one of the first hearing research laboratories to be fully computerized. There, he began a series of studies of listeners' abilities to discriminate complex patterns using brief 10-tone sequences as surrogates for spoken words. This research helped move the field of psychoacoustics away from the study of simple sounds to the investigation of more naturalistic, complex stimuli. This work also revealed very large influences of trial-to-trial uncertainty on the discrimination of complex sounds, providing important early examples of informational masking. Chuck left the CID to serve as the first director of research at Boys Town National Research Hospital, Omaha, Nebraska, from 1977 to 1983, where he established a premier auditory research program (see https://bit.ly/AT-boystown). In 1983, Chuck returned to Indiana University to serve as chair of the Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences. There, he continued his work with complex sounds but also began to lead larger projects such as the six-year Benton-IU Project, which examined the influences on success in learning to read in elementary-school children, and included a large-scale study of individual differences in auditory abilities.

In 1989, Chuck, Diane Kewley-Port, and Dan Maki founded Communications Disorders Technology (CDT), a small business to develop new technologies for hearing and communication science. Under Chuck's leadership, CDT developed training systems for improving speech perception and production and also the National Hearing Test, a digits-in-noise hearing test that can be taken over the telephone. Just a few days before Chuck died, he was gratified to receive an NIH grant that would enable development of the National Hearing Test to continue.

Outside his work life, Chuck had many interests, most notably tennis. He met his wife Betty on the tennis court in St. Louis, and they played countless games together over the next five decades. Chuck is survived by Betty, his wife of 51 years; daughters Ann, Mary, Katharine, and Elizabeth; five grandchildren; and brother Donald Watson.

Selected Publications by Charles Schoff Watson

Kidd, G. R., Watson, C. S., and Gygi, B. (2007). Individual differences in auditory abilities. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 122, 418-435.

Watson, C. S. (1987). Uncertainty, informational masking and the capacity of immediate auditory memory. In Yost, W. A., and Watson, C. S. (Eds.), *Auditory Processing of Complex Sounds*. Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, NJ, pp. 267-277.

Watson, C. S., Kidd, G. R., Horner, D. G., Connell, P. J., Lowther, A., Eddins, D. A., Krueger, G., Goss, D. A., Rainey, B. B., Gospel, M. D., and Watson, B. U. (2003). Sensory, cognitive, and linguistic factors in the early academic performance of elementary school children: The Benton-IU Project. *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 36, 165-197.

Watson, C. S., Kidd, G. R., Miller, J. D., Smits, C., and Humes, L. E. (2012). Telephone screening tests for functionally impaired hearing: Current use in seven countries and development of a U.S. version. *Journal of the American Academy of Audiology* 23, 757-767.

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