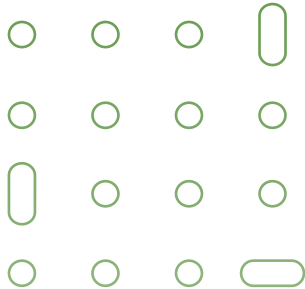


2025 Annual Report

# Inclusive Assessment Research Program



# Introduction

SHL is committed to the inclusion of individuals across all races, genders, ages, and neurotypes. To support this commitment, we

1. conduct research to advance knowledge of evidence-based best practices,
2. implement these approaches in our own products, and
3. share our findings and resulting practical insights with the professional community.

We also gather feedback from clients and candidates and use this to guide research and product improvement. Our products incorporate both empirical findings and feedback from real users and organizations.

“Neurodiversity” is a blanket term used to describe natural differences in cognitive processing<sup>1</sup>. It includes all neurotypes, from neurotypical (adheres to the most common thinking patterns) to neurodivergent (deviates from common thinking patterns). Common examples of neurodivergent conditions include autism spectrum disorder (ASD), dyslexia, and Tourette syndrome. Identifying as having a neurodivergent condition may be a precursor to facing barriers during selection and employment processes. Despite the fact that an estimated 15-20% of the general public is neurodivergent, this population is severely underemployed<sup>2</sup>.

“Diversity in ability” refers to the inclusion of all individuals encompassing all ability levels, including those with physical or mental disabilities. It may refer to mobility impairments, visual or hearing impairments, and cognitive or speech impairments, among others. While some individuals consider neurodivergence a disability, others do not (a factor which may contribute to under-disclosure of neurodivergent status on candidate disclosure forms). Individuals with disabilities also face underemployment and often do not receive accommodations which could facilitate success in the workplace<sup>3</sup>.

1 Dwyer, P. (2022). The neurodiversity approach (es): What are they and what do they mean for researchers?. *Human development*, 66(2), 73-92.

2 Doyle, N. (2020). Neurodiversity at work: a biopsychosocial model and the impact on working adults. *British medical bulletin*, 135(1), 108-125.

3 LARGEST, U. A. S., & POOL, U. T. (2024). Embracing Neurodiversity at Work.

At SHL, we take an action-driven approach to promoting inclusive assessment. This year alone, we have taken the following steps to advance inclusive assessment in science and practice through our Inclusive Assessment Research Program:

- Continued our research to identify and promote **evidence-based best practice in inclusive assessment**.

By pinpointing attributes of the process that are variably effective as a function of neurodivergent status. Current research is focused on predictors of disclosing neurodiversity status as a steppingstone toward improving the experience for all candidates, and understanding neurodivergent candidate reactions to a variety of assessment types.

- Conducted interviews with research participants as part of our **partnership with Black Young Professionals (BYP)**.

One of our key research areas examines how assessment design can impact candidate experiences. Our latest research investigates strategies to create a more inclusive testing environment for all candidates. By considering factors such as test preparation and candidate perceptions, we aim to develop practical recommendations for improving assessment practices.

- Emphasized the design of universally appropriate measures that **consider the experiences of individuals with disabilities**.

Our research in this space is currently focused on understanding how we improve the assessment experience for candidates from the deaf community.

- Renewed our **partnership with Purple Tuesday** and honored our pledge to make advancements **in inclusive assessments** to support applicants with hidden disabilities.

SHL has partnered with Purple Tuesday, a nonprofit which supports the development and maintenance of disability-inclusive organizations, since 2019. We made a Purple Pledge to improve the assessment process for candidates with hidden disabilities and have been updating our assessments to be more inclusive ever since!

- Earned recognition as a **Neuro-Champion** for the **Celebrating Neurodiversity Awards** in the Innovation and Ideas category, sponsored by Genius Within.

Genius Within is a UK-based social enterprise that recognizes individuals and organizations who go above and beyond to promote accessibility and inclusion. SHL was recognized for continuing to advance meaningful research into the assessment experiences of neurodivergent individuals to help employers improve hiring, development, and mobilization processes.

- Presented research at the **Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP)** annual conference, where we discussed evidence-based best practices with talent assessment industry leaders.

A number of additional works have been accepted for the 2025 SIOP annual conference where we look forward to sharing our in-progress and more recent findings.

- **Published research** entitled “Cognitive ability: A promising option for assessing neurodiverse talent” in the **peer-reviewed Consulting Psychology Journal**

Following, we provide an in-depth look at each of these efforts along with new work since the publication of our last [Annual Report](#). We also offer high-level summaries of the insights from our latest research and their implications for assessment providers, organizations, researchers, and candidates. We conclude with steps **you** can take to support the advancement of inclusive assessment.

# Knowledge Sharing: Publications

## Talent Trends Report

SHL published the Talent Trends White Paper in 2024. The report, based on research conducted in 2023 and 2024, details the importance of inclusion initiatives for both organizational success outcomes and employee satisfaction. Key points from the paper include:

Inclusion initiatives improve organizational outcomes		Organizations can take action to promote inclusivity by establishing...	
Attract and Retain Talent	Improve Innovation, Creativity, and Decision-Making	Inclusive Recruitment Practices	Inclusivity-Focused Leadership Development
Enhance Market and Customer Understanding	Develop a Global Perspective	Transparent Performance Evaluation Methods	Inclusive Onboarding Programs
Build a Positive Corporate Reputation	Foster an Inclusive Culture	Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)	Regular D&I Surveys

### Why It Matters

SHL is promoting inclusivity in organizations by sharing evidence of positive outcomes!

## How L&D Leaders Can Support Neurodivergent Talent

SHL Scientist McKenzie Specht was invited to write this article for TrainingIndustry.com, published in November of 2024. The piece educates readers about neurodivergent candidates/employees and provides tangible recommendations for leadership to help neurodivergent talent thrive at work.

Leadership can support neurodivergent talent by...	
Fostering Inclusive Culture through Leadership	Providing Educational Resources about Neurodiversity
Advocating for Flexible Work Arrangements	Promoting Psychological Safety and Open Communication
Adopting Neuroinclusive Practices in Selection	Establishing Mentorship Programs or Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

### Why It Matters

SHL is sharing evidence-based, practical tips to foster inclusive leadership and healthy workplaces!

## Cognitive ability: A promising option for assessing neurodiverse talent

The Consulting Psychology Journal published research by SHL examining the use of cognitive ability assessments, specifically for the assessment of neurodivergent individuals. The paper presents three studies examining score differences across neurotypes. Findings suggested that on average, neurodivergent participants were generally able to achieve comparable scores to neurotypical participants in a similar amount of time. This finding contributes to the field by providing evidence that cognitive ability assessments generally offer candidates from a neurodiverse talent pool the opportunity to demonstrate abilities.

Research Question	Do neurodivergent individuals and neurotypical individuals show score differences for cognitive ability assessments?
Participants	Participants were individuals who navigated to SHL's practice test site, registered to take a cognitive ability practice assessment, and gave consent for data to be collected. Studies ranged from 42,000 to 308,000 participants.
Methods	Participants responded to a demographic questionnaire, which included an opportunity to disclose neurodivergence, then completed the cognitive ability assessment of their choosing (Verbal Ability, Numerical Reasoning, Inductive Reasoning, Deductive Reasoning, Interactive Inductive Reasoning, and/or Interactive Numerical Reasoning)
Results	Negligible to small between-group differences were found in test scores. In most cases, individuals who disclosed ASD completed tests faster than individuals who did not, regardless of score differences.
Key Takeaways	SHL's cognitive ability tests produce small score differences across neurotypes Some neurodivergent individuals, particularly those with ASD, may be inclined to complete tests more quickly than neurotypical individuals Additional research can support future understanding of the nuances of these relationships

### Why It Matters

SHL continues to conduct scientific research to ensure that its assessments are inclusive and accessible for all participants. Additionally, we published our empirical work to share and advance knowledge across the field to support best practices and inclusivity across the globe.

## Knowledge Sharing: Blog Posts

See additional writing pieces from 2024 centered around inclusivity by clicking the links below:

### Continuing SHL's Inclusive Assessment Research

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Here, SHL describes a comprehensive research project examining whether exposure to practice questions improves assessment performance – and whether it reduces racial group differences in assessment scores (it does!).

### Celebrating Purple Tuesday: SHL Continues to Advocate for Inclusion and Accessibility

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In this blog post, SHL describes our partnership with Purple Tuesday, a worldwide event that celebrates the commitment of participating organizations to improve the global customer experience for people with disabilities. It also explains its own Purple Pledge and commitment to inclusive assessment.

### Insights into Neurodiversity in the Workplace

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This blog post, published during Autism Awareness Month, gives an educational overview of neurodiversity and highlights a few key findings from related research over the recent years. It also describes SHL's commitment to inclusive assessment.

### Five Ways Inclusion Initiatives Improve the Workplace and How to Make Them Work

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This blog post explains how inclusion initiatives lead to the attraction and retention of talent; improved innovation, creativity, and decision-making; increased market and customer understanding; development of a global perspective; and a culture of creativity. It also gives practical strategies which can be adopted by organizations to foster inclusivity.

### Helping Level the Playing Field: Developing a "Lived Experience" Assessment

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In this example of SHL's commitment to inclusion, we share how we collaborated with a customer to develop an innovative assessment that would level the playing field for candidates with nontraditional lived experiences.

# Knowledge Sharing: In the Industry

## Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) Conference

Representatives from SHL presented to members of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology at the 2024 SIOP Conference in Chicago, Illinois. Over 4,600 professionals were in attendance at the conference. SHL promoted inclusive assessment by leading or participating in 20 sessions in 2024. Some highlighted sessions included:

Diverse Minds,  
Inclusive Measures:  
Considerations for  
Neurodivergent  
Success

Equitable Design  
in Assessment  
Space: Best Practice,  
the Reality, and  
Challenges

A Scientist-Practitioner  
Approach to  
Improving Experiences  
of Neurodiverse  
Candidates

Incorporating  
Inclusion in  
Research: Innovative  
Practices from the  
Field

Tapping Talent and  
Enhancing Inclusion:  
Applicants with  
Nontraditional Lived  
Experiences

Beyond the  
buzzwords:  
Neurodiversity  
inclusion and better  
work for all

Some of our sessions invited panelists (including SHL representatives) to share findings from current research; others discussed the integration of Universal Design into assessment with practical applications; and still others featured the evidence-based skills unique to diverse teams that are inclusive of a broad range of backgrounds and experience.

**SHL shared research insights, practical tips, and benefits of inclusion in 20 sessions at the SIOP 2024 conference**

### Why It Matters

SHL is actively sharing knowledge with industry professionals in an effort to level the playing field for all candidates via inclusive and accessible assessment experiences. By contributing to conference discussions and publishing internal research, SHL is prioritizing our commitment to inclusion.

**Spotlight:** SHL continues to advance this commitment to knowledge-sharing in other ways. We shape the field from within through the work of SHL scientists and consultants who collaborate with, advise, and educate practitioners to ensure the consistent integration of best practices in selection and development processes. This is done through accessibility sessions and daily client conversations!



## Blacks in Industrial/Organizational Psychology (BIOP) Conference

SHL presented at the first annual Blacks in I/O Psychology (BIOP) conference in Atlanta, Georgia. Representatives discussed findings from a quantitative study examining the impact of taking a practice test on actual cognitive ability assessment scores. The study set out to examine whether practice tests could improve performance, a strategy that could help all assessment-takers.

### Question

Does taking a practice assessment improve performance in actual test scores?

### Findings

Taking a practice assessment before an actual assessment improves performance for all candidates

Though other studies have found preliminary evidence that taking practice tests improves performance in actual assessment scores, SHL's work found no differential impact of the practice test as a function of racial group. However, being exposed to practice items did generally improve overall scores for all candidates.

Now, SHL is interviewing candidates about their assessment experiences and getting real-time feedback on some of our most commonly used assessments. This data will contribute to a qualitative study and inform future improvements to SHL assessments.

**SHL research found that even completing just three to give practice questions had a significant positive impact on cognitive ability assessment scores.**

### Why It Matters

SHL is working to define evidence-based best practices for inclusive assessment. SHL was honored to be offered the opportunity to work with BIOP in its inaugural conference and share its work with the professionals it affects—and is excited to be returning later this year with updates.

## Minnesota Professionals for Psychology Applied to Work (MPPAW)

Representatives from SHL presented to students and MPPAW members at the 2024 MPPAW Conference in Minnesota. The two-hour seminar covered:

### What is Neurodiversity?

### Neurodiversity & Selection Assessments

### Neurodiversity & Cognitive Ability

### Disclosure & Related Research

### How SHL is Making Changes to Advance Inclusivity

### Accommodations for Neurodiversity

### Benefits to All Stakeholders

A keynote point in this presentation was **disclosure**. Disclosure is a prerequisite of workplace accommodation, but many barriers exist that prevent job applicants and new hires from disclosing a disabled or neurodivergent status. Females are slightly more likely to disclose neurodivergence than males, and disclosure rates vary by neurotype. To encourage disclosure, which helps employees receive accommodations and improve organizational performance, SHL has conducted multiple studies on the factors that influence disclosure rates.

**SHL research found that the introduction of inclusive language to a standard disclosure form doubled disclosure rates for most neurotypes.**

### Why It Matters

SHL is teaching the next generation of scientists and practitioners evidence-based benefits of inclusivity (in this case, specifically for neuro-inclusivity). Additionally, we are conducting research that has practical applications to improve organizational success & employee experiences.

# Recognition

## Celebrating Neurodiversity Award from Genius Within

In 2024, SHL was honored to be named a Neuro-Champion in the Innovation and Ideas category for the Celebrating Neurodiversity Awards, sponsored by Genius Within. The award recognizes organizations for going above and beyond to promote accessibility and inclusion. SHL was specifically recognized for advancing meaningful research about the neurodivergent assessment experience.

Read our blog about the Genius Within award offered to SHL this year: [SHL's Groundbreaking Neurodiversity Research Recognized by Genius Within CIC](#)

**“This award from Genius Within is a testament to the impact of our research in driving meaningful change and empowering Neurodivergent individuals to thrive in their careers. We are honored to be recognized for our work and remain dedicated to advancing the conversation around inclusion in the workplace.”**

**– Sara Gutierrez, Chief Science Officer at SHL**

SHL continues to make strides by furthering the type of research that was recognized by Genius Within this year. Neurodiversity research is in full swing as we head into 2025.



# Knowledge Advancement: Works-in-Progress at SHL for 2025

## Research Efforts

- Our paper **“Navigating disclosure: Understanding neurodivergent candidates’ experiences in assessment environments”** has been completed and is currently under review for publication with a peer-reviewed journal. This paper examines data collected in 2023 and finds that **when inclusive language is used on disclosure forms, the disclosure rate of neurodiversity doubles** for most divergent neurotypes.
- Our paper **“Exploring the applicant reactions of autistic individuals to digital personnel selection instruments: A reflexive thematic analysis,”** developed in partnership with the Healthy Work Lab at Florida International University, has been completed and is currently under second review to be submitted for publication with a peer-reviewed journal.
- Disclosure data collected in 2023 and 2024 is currently being analyzed to **examine demographic differences in neurotype disclosure rates** as an effort to identify potential sources of disparity in candidate experiences.
- In 2024, SHL introduced a survey on our practice site, SHL Direct, to ask for **candidate reactions to the assessment process**. Now, preliminary data from this reaction form is being analyzed to **examine the applicant experience and identify potential sources of under-disclosure**.
- The Inclusive Assessment Research Program is **conducting international interviews with candidates** as they complete SHL assessments. By doing so, we are collecting meaningful data about the candidate experience and working to improve it.

## Applied Efforts

- In 2024, SHL **improved screen reader support** for our text-based assessments, including Job Focused Assessments (JFAs) and our Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ), and are working on the option for applicants to **hide the timer** on timed assessments. In doing so, SHL is allowing users who rely on accommodations to utilize them without requiring disclosure, in alignment with the principles of **Universal Design**.
- SHL is in the process of **expanding its collection of disability-accessible assessments** by offering alternative formats for our cognitive assessments.
- In 2023, SHL rolled out an **updated disclosure form** on SHLDirect, designed with more inclusive wording for individuals with disabilities and/or neurodivergent statuses than previous versions. SHL are in the process of expanding this initiative by **adding a reaction form** to learn more about the **candidate disclosure experience**. This data is currently under review.
- Representatives from SHL will present at the **SIOP 2025** and **BIOP 2025 conferences** in over 30 seminars, panels, poster presentations, and other sessions.

# Get Involved

## Candidates

- Share feedback about your experience with the application and assessment process
- Share available data you have within your organization to support academic research
- Familiarize yourself with assessments and the potential accommodations that are available to you
- Take practice assessments when available before taking selection assessments

## Assessment Developers

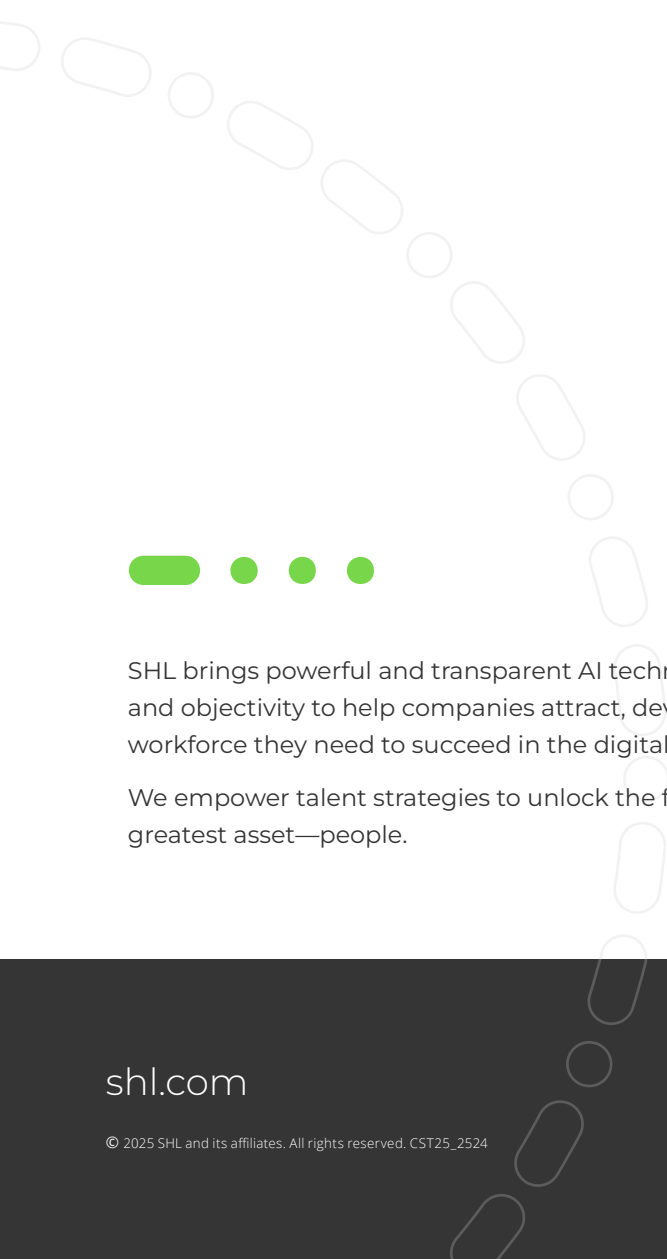
- Partner with organizations to collect the industry data which is necessary for advancement in research and practice
- Leverage existing and upcoming research to maximize the accessibility and inclusivity of your assessments
- Look into Universal Design work and strive to adhere to its principles when developing assessments to create inclusive and accessible candidate experiences

## Organizations

- Offer candidates practice assessments before they take selection assessments
- Educate candidates about what they can expect from assessments and what types of accommodations are available to them
- Use inclusive language on all materials, but especially on disclosure forms to encourage facilitation of disclosure and accommodation
- Take an individualized approach to supporting candidates and employees
- Join SHL as a research partner to support the advancement of evidence-based best practices and be rewarded with insights that can support your success

## Researchers

- Get involved in research with organizations to help bridge the gap between science and practice
- Include researchers with lived experience on your research team to ensure inclusivity in the research development process (“Nothing about us without us!”)
- Join SHL as a research partner as we seek to identify and promote inclusion in both academic and industry settings



SHL brings powerful and transparent AI technology, data science, and objectivity to help companies attract, develop, and grow the workforce they need to succeed in the digital era.

We empower talent strategies to unlock the full potential of your greatest asset—people.