

2026 Annual Report

Inclusive Assessment Research Program



SHL

Introduction

Through SHL's Inclusive Assessment Research Program (IARP), and in cooperation with research partners, we **conduct research to advance knowledge of evidence-based best practices for inclusive assessment**. Our products are not only designed with accessibility and inclusion as a priority but also grounded in a foundation of empirical research. We gather feedback, both formally and informally, from clients and candidates, and use the insights we gain to guide research, innovation, and product improvement.

Over the past several years, SHL has been steadily building this program as part of a broader commitment to championing more accessible and inclusive talent practices. What began as a set of questions rooted in curiosity (raised both internally and through conversations with clients) has grown into a sustained, multi-year research effort with increasing reach and impact. Early work focused on understanding challenges candidates face in assessment. Over time, our focus has shifted toward action and identifying how assessments can be designed to help people overcome those barriers or avoid them altogether. This evolution has shaped the growth of SHL's Inclusive Assessment Research Program and helped to refine our research goals.

Today, we focus on shaping assessments that support all talent, regardless of demographic individual differences.

Our Year in Review

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:

- Continued our research to identify and promote evidence-based best practice in inclusive assessment.
- Advocated for inclusive research and the implementation of accessible assessment strategies (including Universal Design) through conference presentations, client discussions, external partnerships, and more.
- Renewed our partnership with Purple Tuesday and honored our pledge to make advancements in inclusive assessments to support applicants with hidden disabilities.
- Presented research at the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) annual conference, giving voice to the challenges faced by diverse groups of talent and strategies for progressing toward inclusive assessment.
- Published research entitled "Exploring the Applicant Reactions of Autistic Individuals to Digital Personnel Selection Instruments: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis" in the peer-reviewed International Journal of Selection and Assessment.

In this annual report, we summarize our progress and high-level updates since the publication of our last report in early 2025. Then, we share insights from our latest research and ongoing projects along with their **key takeaways** for assessment providers, organizations, researchers, and candidates. We conclude with steps **you** can take to support SHL's IARP and inclusive research more broadly.

Knowledge Sharing: Publications

Applicant Reactions of Autistic Individuals to Selection Instruments

The International Journal of Selection and Assessment (IJS) published research by SHL in collaboration with Dr. Valentina Bruk-Lee and the Healthy Work Lab at Florida International University. The paper, titled, "Exploring the Applicant Reactions of Autistic Individuals to Digital Personnel Selection Instruments: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis," examined reactions to selection assessments among participants with autism to explore the assessment experience and identify potential opportunities for assessment improvement.

To learn more about this research, you can read the abstract by clicking here: [Exploring the Applicant Reactions of Autistic Individuals to Digital Personnel Selection Instruments: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis](#)

As detailed in the paper, we found qualitative evidence of assessment characteristics with potential to help or hinder the test-taking experience for adults who identify as autistic.

Why It Matters

SHL is working with academic experts to better understand how neurodivergent individuals experience assessments. By sharing these findings, we aim to help improve assessment design so more people can demonstrate their abilities and perform at their best.

Inclusive Training Strategies for Neurodivergent Learners

After her debut article with the organization last year, SHL Scientist McKenzie Specht was invited by TrainingIndustry.com to return to author another article titled "**Inclusive Training Strategies for Neurodivergent Learners**" for publication on their website. The article focused on strategies organizations can implement to make training initiatives more inclusive, especially for neurodivergent learners. The piece educates readers about supporting neurodivergent employees and provides tangible strategies for leadership to help maximize the inclusivity of training throughout design and implementation stages.

To discover how you can integrate these principles into your organization's training systems, you can read the full article [Inclusive Training Strategies for Neurodivergent Learners](#).

The article offers three basic principles of inclusive training design: **Environmental Adjustments**, **Flexible Learning Approaches**, and **Clear and Structured Communication**. These modifications can be achieved through three actionable steps as detailed: **Pre-Training Preparations**, **Interactive and Engaging Methods**, and **Post-Training Support**. An accompanying blog was also published around this topic, [Inclusive Training for Neurodivergent Employees](#).

Why It Matters

SHL is developing and sharing resources that **translate science into actionable strategies**. In sharing this article, we offer concrete steps that supervisors and HR professionals can take to improve inclusivity in the workplace now. These practical tips support inclusive leadership and promote workplace wellbeing for everyone. This is especially important as we move into 2026, when neurodiversity awareness continues to grow but meaningful action has begun to stall, according to a trend highlighted by [NeuroBridge](#) following a late-2025 webinar.

Knowledge Sharing: In the Industry

Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) Conference

Representatives of SHL presented to members of the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology at the 2025 SIOP conference in Denver, Colorado. Over 4,000 SIOP members and 1,700 students attended the conference. SHL promoted inclusive assessment in several sessions that were led or contributed to by SHL Scientists. Some highlighted sessions include:

Bridging Theory and Practice: Academics and Practitioners on Promoting Neurodiversity

Advancing Assessment Design: Considerations for Access and Accessibility

From Awareness to Action: Neuroinclusive Hiring Practices

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

The Research Process: Studies Done by and With Individuals with Disabilities

Sessions varied in focus, with some inviting panelists (including SHL representatives) to share insights from current research, and others explored practical applications of Universal Design in assessment. Across sessions, diverse voices were represented, with actionable takeaways provided to conference attendees.

We are excited to announce that numerous SHL-led sessions have been accepted into the 2026 SIOP conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, where we will continue to partner with industry-leading researchers and practitioners to give voice to emerging work in the inclusive assessment space.

Why It Matters

SHL is committed to **not just advancing but also sharing knowledge** about what works best to effectively and appropriately assess candidates from diverse talent pools. By participating in conferences geared toward both academics and practitioners, we are ensuring that **information is readily available** so that inclusive assessment strategies can be implemented in real time in both research and practice as new knowledge is uncovered.

Knowledge Advancement: Current Research

SHL has been collecting data for several years, in a process guided by research questions identified as part of the IARP in our early research agenda. In 2025, our continuous efforts are paying off: several projects are approaching or have reached sufficient sample sizes for analysis, allowing us to prepare new findings, develop future projects and research questions, and make strides toward more inclusive talent assessment.

Research Efforts

- Working in close partnership with the **Black Young Professionals Network** and **Dr. Emily Campion** from the University of Iowa, we conducted a qualitative study to explore reactions to psychometric assessments from **participants of diverse backgrounds**. This ongoing research seeks to deepen our understanding of candidates' perceptions of pre-employment psychometric assessment. The analysis process is currently under way.

Collected quantitative data on SHL Direct, our practice test website, to answer important research questions with empirical evidence:

- We examined whether **individuals affiliated with the military** (through past service, present service, or intent to serve in the future) disclosed neurodivergence at a different rate than the civilian population. This study is currently in progress and being prepared for publication.
- We asked participants whether any modifications from a provided list would have been helpful as assessment supports on cognitive and non-cognitive assessments. This study included data from nearly 13,000 participants across the different assessment types! While the utility of modifications should never be broadly assumed given the individual nature of neurodiversity, early analysis reveals clear patterns. All modifications that were listed were perceived as useful and endorsed by at least some individuals across neurodivergent, neurotypical, and combined samples, suggesting that **assessment modifications can benefit everyone, regardless of neurodivergent status**.
- Across groups, **extra time emerged as a particularly high-value, low-complexity option for improving accessibility**. At the same time, some modifications appeared to meet more specific needs. For example, tools such as screen readers were more strongly endorsed by individuals of certain neurotypes, underscoring the importance of offering a flexible range of support options rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.
- We surveyed individuals about their reactions to various cognitive and non-cognitive talent assessments. Overall, **participants reported generally positive experiences**, with average responses falling on the favorable side for all perception items, including things like ability to perform their best and whether the assessment content was clear to them. While neurodivergent participants reported slightly less positive experiences on average, these differences were small. However, they highlight the **value of making assessment modifications available early in the candidate journey** to help reduce uncertainty. In addition, organizations may benefit from strengthening upfront communication about the purpose of cognitive assessments and how results are used, which can further support positive candidate experiences across groups.

Get Involved

SHL relies on participant, client, and academic research partners to continue progressing our inclusive assessment research. If you'd like to contribute to or be involved in data collection efforts as a research partner or participant, please contact us to hear about current opportunities for collaboration. For more information, visit our [research partner webpage](#).

For actionable ways you can get involved in promoting inclusive research as a participant, researcher, organization, or assessment developer, see the table below.

Participants

- **Spread the Word.** Educating the people around you about the importance of inclusion in the workplace and opportunities for involvement in research leads to greater participation and faster, more widespread change.
- **Take Practice Assessments.** Before participating in talent assessments, take advantage of practice opportunities to not only familiarize yourself with the testing format and item types, but also contribute to data used for inclusive assessment research. You can take practice assessments and contribute to our research at SHL Direct.
- **Share Your Feedback.** Sharing feedback about your experience throughout the assessment process helps us identify what is working well and what might offer an opportunity for improvement.
- **Explore Accommodation Options.** Before completing a talent assessment, do some research to find out what assessment modifications might be available and/or helpful to you as a test taker. Identify whether the modification(s) are offered and reach out if you have questions.

Researchers

- **Partner with SHL.** Collaborate with SHL as a research partner as we seek to progress accessibility and inclusion across both academic and industry settings.
- **Diversify Your Research Teams.** Include researchers with diverse lived experiences on your research teams, ensuring diversity of perspectives, full access to research opportunities for everyone, and inclusion in all stages of the research process.
- **Collaborate with Organizations.** Conduct research in partnership with organizations and employees to help bridge the gap between science and practice.
- **Prioritize Inclusion and Accessibility.** Collecting data on a handful of additional questions (such as those asking about helpful assessment modifications) on your research surveys can be an easy way to advance inclusion research. Collecting this type of data adds to the opportunity to investigate inclusion and accessibility.

Organizations

- **Offer Practice Opportunities.** Offering candidates the opportunity to practice before engaging with talent assessments builds confidence and familiarity with the assessment content and platform.
- **Offer Informational Materials.** Instruct candidates about what they can expect from talent assessments and provide educational materials about what accommodations are available.
- **Send Inclusive Signals.** Using positive, inclusive language on all your materials sends supportive messaging to candidates and offers psychological safety. Previous SHL research has found that the introduction of inclusive language to a standard disclosure form doubled disclosure rates for most neurotypes.
- **Take an Individualized Approach.** Recognize that inclusivity and accessibility are never achieved through assumptions or prescriptive methods. Instead, candidates should be comfortable understanding and communicating what modifications they may need. Organizations should take as much of an individualized approach to supporting requests as possible.
- **Partner with SHL.** Collaborate with SHL as a research partner, which can take many different forms. By allowing SHL to collect and utilize anonymous data from your organization, for instance, your organization can support the advancement of empirically-driven best practices and be rewarded with insights to support your employees' success.

Assessment Developers

- **Partner to Collect Data.** Partnering with organizations to collect industry data and sharing your insights allows for advancement in research and practice that will impact real candidates and organizations.
- **Integrate Universal Design.** Applying the principles of Universal Design in assessment development supports the creation of future-proof, inclusive, and universally accessible assessments, promoting positive candidate experiences.
- **Stay Informed.** Leveraging existing and upcoming research can help you maximize the inclusivity and accessibility of your assessments, progressing the field of talent assessment toward better candidate experiences.



SHL provides trusted Talent Intelligence that empowers organizations to make confident data-driven people decisions. Built on 45+ years of expertise, our innovative assessment solutions combine proven behavioral science, predictive analytics, and transparent AI to deliver objective, actionable insights across the talent lifecycle – from hiring and development to internal mobility. We help leaders measure skills and potential, unlock performance, and mobilize talent to drive transformation.

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