Pronouns as cohesive devices

Some common problems
Redundant pronouns

Their brother who works in Sydney visits them in New Zealand every year.

The graphs show the changing trends in expenditure on fast food in the last 10 years.

This essay will discuss four main factors that contribute to the ....

Working in the morning and attending lectures in the afternoon, it is quite challenging.
One difference between secondary school and university is that it offers more subject choices and independence.

Which one? Secondary school or university?

One difference between secondary school and university is that university offers more subject choices and independence.
One characteristic of *silicon* is *their* usefulness to industry and science.
Inconsistent reference

This relates to the unnecessary shifting of pronouns from third person (they) to second (you) and first person pronoun (we):

All students have problems but students who have English as a second language face far greater problems. Often they may not understand instructions told to them at meetings or over the phone. You may also struggle in your lectures. We may also be afraid to ask questions when in doubt. Therefore, there needs to be more funded support to help us achieve academic success.

Revision with more consistent reference:

All students have problems but students who have English as a second language face far greater problems. Often they may not understand instructions told to them at meetings or over the phone. They/These students may also struggle in their lectures. They may also be afraid to ask questions when in doubt. Therefore, there needs to be more funded support to help non-native English students achieve academic success.

NB: For variety and interest, you can replace one or two instances of ‘they’ by repeating the key noun, ‘students’ or use a synonym, ‘non-native English students’ (Repetition is the second cohesive device discussed in this unit).
Confusion between *it* and *this*

This confusion occurs when you attempt to make a cross-reference in the second sentence to something mentioned in the first sentence. Study these two examples:

**The Royal Albert Hall** is the venue for many royal variety performances. *It* underwent major renovations in 2001.

(correct use of *it*)

In the two main studies, *no dramatic change was found in the rate of corrosion.* *This* may be due to several factors.

(*This* is used because the reference is to the **whole idea** expressed in the first sentence -that ‘no dramatic change was found in the rate of corrosion’.)
This relates to the inappropriate use of first person pronouns (*I, me, my, our, we, us*) and second person pronouns (*you, your*) in academic writing. In general, first person pronouns are acceptable in personal, reflective or creative writing. Consider the following sentences and their revisions:

*First of all, I tried to determine the cause of the mechanical failure.*

→ *First of all, it was necessary to determine the cause of the mechanical failure.*

*In the next section, we tried to find creative and sustainable solutions to the problems.*

→ *The next section focused on finding creative and sustainable solutions.*

OR

→ *In the next section, the focus was on finding creative and sustainable solutions.*
Finally: A chart of pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject of sentence</th>
<th>Object of sentence</th>
<th>Possessive (ownership)</th>
<th>Reflexive (referring back to subject of the sentence)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>eg, <em>We decided to repeat the experiment. It was successful.</em></td>
<td>eg, <em>The results were known to them.</em></td>
<td>eg, <em>It was their mistake.</em></td>
<td>eg, <em>They did it themselves.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I (first person)</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>my, mine</td>
<td>myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we (first person)</td>
<td>us</td>
<td>our, ours</td>
<td>ourselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you (second person)</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>your, yours</td>
<td>yourself, yourselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he (third person)</td>
<td>him</td>
<td>his</td>
<td>himself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she (third person)</td>
<td>her</td>
<td>her, hers</td>
<td>herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it (third person)</td>
<td>it</td>
<td>its</td>
<td>itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they (third person)</td>
<td>them</td>
<td>their, theirs</td>
<td>themselves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Demonstrative pronouns**

this (singular), these (plural); closer reference: that (singular), those (plural)