

Pronouns as cohesive devices

Some common problems

Redundant pronouns

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

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

This essay ~~it~~ will discuss four main factors that contribute to the

Working in the morning and attending lectures in the afternoon, ~~it~~ is quite challenging.

Unclear reference

*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.*

No agreement between referent and pronoun

No agreement

referent (singular)

pronoun (plural)

*One characteristic of **silicon** is **their** usefulness to industry and science.*

its

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:

correct use of *it*

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

(**It** is used in the second sentence to refer to **one specific noun** or noun phrase or object in the first sentence).

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'.)

A matter of style

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

Subject of sentence	Object of sentence	Possessive (ownership)	Reflexive (referring back to subject of the sentence)
<i>eg, We decided to repeat the experiment. It was successful.</i>	<i>eg, The results were known to them.</i>	<i>eg, It was their mistake.</i>	<i>eg, They did it themselves.</i>
I (first person)	me	my, mine	myself
we (first person)	us	our, ours	ourselves
you (second person)	you	your, yours	yourself, yourselves
he (thirds person)	him	his	himself
she (third person)	her	her, hers	herself
it (third person)	it	its	itself
they (third person)	them	their, theirs	themselves
Demonstrative pronouns			
this (singular), these (plural); closer reference: that (singular), those (plural)			