

I.T. to enjoy.

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Some might say – what is there in Information Technology (I.T.) to enjoy, unless you are technically minded? A phone is a phone and computers can become time wasters not to mention slates, tablets and e-readers plus recorders, games and music players. But if that is the case I think I must waste an awful lot of time as I love to try them all.

Sadly, all these gadgets cost money, but the good news is that there are a growing number of free applications (known as ‘apps’) and easy to access reading materials for the burgeoning world of portables. **Digital books** on the Kindle, Sony and other e-readers are cheaper than paper based versions and, if you have wifi versions, you can download reading matter at any time. There are many free classics. You can enlarge text with a font that suits you best. Where copyright allows you can use text to speech technology to listen to books. The screens on dedicated e-readers tend to have ‘less glare’, which may make for more comfortable reading over time, compared to the slates and tablets such as the iPad. However, I will happily read a factual article on a slate despite the brightly backlit screen, and I find that reading emails and messages can be easier with the high contrast levels, making the black text stand out, but not for long.

Watching **videos** can be fun on the latest slates or tablets. If you are linked up to the Internet, one press of an icon brings up recent news bulletins, film reviews or iPlayer re-runs. Media companies deliver these and many other viewing channels via free apps. Or you can download films and music via the app store linked to the operating system such as iTunes or Android.

If you keep your **photos** online in an archive such as Flickr, letting your fingers flip through hundreds of them on a 10 inch screen is nearly as good as looking through a photograph album and infinitely better than clicking or scrolling through several screens on a desktop. You can share them with others and email them on with comments.

If you have a **smart phone**, you may find you have an e-reader, games player, recorder camera, video and MP3 player all rolled into one. The phone usually comes with a collection of built-in applications, but they tend to be useful rather than fun, such as a calendar, address book, email, notes etc. If you are choosing a phone to enjoy as well as for work, browse the app stores not just for music and films but also for games, utilities, recipes and any number of other activities. Apps can be free of

charge, but there are times when these versions may not have all the features offered on the paid-for version, and you may have to put up with advertisements. Try to find reviews about apps before downloading, and be aware that too many open ones will slow your phone down.

One of the best apps when you are away from home is a **digital map** that provides you with your location and even somewhere to eat in unfamiliar places, or what to see and do. These apps work in a similar way to Google maps online and sometime come as part of the operating system. Once you have arrived at a restaurant, it is possible to translate the **menu** with a dictionary app so you know what you are eating or take a picture of it and with optical character recognition and text to speech, have the menu read out to you. There are apps to guide you about food and drink, calories and carbs as well as every other subject you can think of. Need some exercise after the meal? Make sure your **accelerometer or pedometer app** is working and you will soon learn how many calories you burn off as you walk home whilst also listening to your chosen music tracks to keep yourself energised! Too late to walk? Check national or local **transport timetables** online via an app and catch the last bus or train. You may find a growing acceptance of **digital money** so you do not even need cash for the journey – the phone acts in a similar way to an Oyster card on the London underground. Use a **Twitter** app to tweet your latest news or check on **Facebook** to see what your friends are doing – all from one device.

Not able to get out there for more exercise? As we are talking about technology, perhaps it is time to mention the **Nintendo Wii** with its sports, games and keep fit programmes. You can watch your scores increase over the months and your co-ordination improve with virtual ski jumps!

Nintendo also has its **brain training** and I have tried the DS Lite with some students who say it gets the brain going on the way into lectures. You can challenge yourself with different levels and test specific skills such as mental arithmetic and spelling.

So with a mix of technologies and no mention of T.V., D.V.D. or Xbox players, you really can have 'I.T. to enjoy'. If by now you are wondering what all this 'app' business is about and want to try some but you don't have a smart phone or slate, install **GMDesk** on your computer. Instead of having to go to your browser (such as Internet Explorer or FireFox) to run your GMail, Google Calendar, Google Docs, Google Maps, Google Reader and Picasa Web Albums you can have them as individual mini programs. I also suggest you try the free Kindle app or Twitter app on your desktop. All for no extra cost other than what you pay to use the Internet.

Happy surfing!