

## Putting the Smart into Our Smartphones

by Dina Alsibai  
Lecturer at King Saud University



Owning a smartphone and filling it with a huge variety of applications is becoming more and more common today, so there's no chance that anyone would even think of turning a blind eye to such technology and the conveniences it has to offer. Though many would argue that using smartphones may have many drawbacks such as encouraging alienation from others, activity procrastination, and negative productivity, the reality is that we could have the most renowned researchers and psychologists provide the strongest proof against using smartphones, but I strongly doubt that their findings and pleas would have much, if any impact, on avid smartphone users, including myself.

But I was not always this pro-smartphone; if you'd asked me a few years ago, I would have

said they're just a waste of precious time.

Back then, I definitely wasn't "smart"! I'll never forget how horribly I abused the first iPhone I possessed, my beloved iPhone 1. Tens of applications would be installed every week, then deleted, followed by an installation of endless new applications the following week, and the cycle was repeated over and over - Much wasted time, but no real benefit other than hours of mostly useless discoveries. Over time, however, this excessive fascination lessened and I became more aware of the true treasures that could be found on these phones. As such, since smartphones are here, and most likely are here to stay, fully accepting their existence and trying to utilize them to our benefit would probably be the "smartest" thing to do!

The great Einstein once said, "I fear the day that technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots." What do you think? How about we prove him wrong! Yes, we can. We truly can by using our smartphones to our advantage, heightening social interaction and knowledge by enhancing regular everyday life activities and communication via many amazing applications, or as I like to call them "tools", that can be installed ever so easily onto our phones. No doubt, an endless array of wonderful applications is out there to choose from, and everyone has their own favorites, but here the focus will be on a few free Android and iPhone/iPad applications that will surely come in very handy during your educational endeavor.

Among the most commonly used applications among COLT students are dictionaries and translators. "Dictionary.com Dictionary & Thesaurus - Free", and "Merriam-Webster Dictionary" are among the best dictionary applications out there. Both are very comprehensive, offer extensive integrated thesauri, example sentences, voice search, and audio pronunciation, as well as several other pedagogical features. As far as machine translators go, "iTranslate" is a very special, award-winning application that easily helps break down language barriers. It offers many unique features such as native-like pronunciation, text-to-speech and voice recognition options.



And speaking of text-to-speech and speech-to-text help, the “SpeakText FREE” app can read aloud text and web pages, and “Dragon Dictation” is fantastic for dictating anything you need typed, both in English and Arabic.

Another skill which many students want to improve is their writing. Most of these students mainly have two complaints; not having enough ideas under the pressure of taking exams and weak grammar and language structures. These students often come to their teachers for advice on how to improve, and this is when we tell them, “Read, read, read!” Reading truly is an amazingly enjoyable way to improve most language skills at once. So what do smartphones offer us when it comes to reading material? Well, if you’re in the mood for a book, “Stanza” offers around 50,000 free e-books that can be downloaded on your device and read offline anytime you want. For a lighter read, “Flipboard: Your Social News Magazine” is a wonderful application that offers all the news articles you want in one place; its filled with breaking news, travel, world events, and much more, which can be read at your leisure and shared with others via various social networks, using an application like “Twitter” or “Facebook”, if you like.

So, are you ready to write

any student’s study, regardless of specialization, s/he will most likely need to submit several research papers or reports. To make this deed much easier, we now have applications that greatly help in achieving this. Using the online storage features of “Dropbox” along with a very user-friendly application called “Plain text” makes writing and editing so much easier, as anything you type in a plain text document is automatically synchronized in your dropbox. Then, at your own convenience, you can do the rest of the work, like formatting, on your laptop. Great; now we have our ideas, and a place to store them safely, so now comes the time to look for reliable information to incorporate in our papers. EBSCOhost is one of the best databases for finding great journal, magazine, and newspaper articles, and all this can be found, literally, between the palms of your

hands in the “EBSCOhost” app! And when you’re ready to cite your sources, “Easybib” can do that for you in a few seconds. Now if you’re in the mood to just write your heart away, “Rhyme lite” is an excellent tool that facilitates finding words that rhyme for your poems, and if it’s just an essay that you need help with, the “IELTS writing” app can give you a lot of inspiration and indirect guidance through many well-organized essays. Smartphones can be, indeed, very “smart”; it all depends really on how we use them. They are often very close to us in proximity making them very accessible, and this is why along with the great fun that we can have while using them, we need to try to find those applications that truly enhance the quality of what’s important in life, like our education, which gets us that much closer to achieving our dreams.



Huda Bukhari