Amazon Kindle e-reader

The Kindle uses “e-Ink” technology to display printed pages on a small screen. Items to be displayed on the Kindle must be in a proprietary Amazon format, and can be downloaded from Amazon directly on the Kindle ($9.99 or less for most), or certain documents can be emailed to a special Kindle email address, converted to the Amazon format and sent to the Kindle for 10 cents. The Kindle can also play Audible format audio books, and can play mp3s as “background music” while reading. Kindle allows typed annotations on documents, and bookmarking within documents.

$399.00 for device, additional for content.

Apple iPhone

The Apple iPhone is a web-enabled multimedia cell phone with iPod functionality and a camera built in. The AT&T service for the iPhone allows you to maintain network connection everywhere AT&T service is available, or wherever a WiFi network is available. Built in email applications and web browser let you manage your mail and bookmark web sites. The Safari browser displays full webpages, although can’t handle embedded java applications. Patented two-finger “pinch” technology on the touch screen allows zooming on web pages and other content.

Images, music and video can be loaded onto the iPhone via your computer, or the latter can be purchased from the iTunes Store directly from the iPhone. The rotatable display makes viewing video more comfortable than previous iPod versions.

iPhone starts at $399, 2-year AT&T service contract starting at $59.99/month required.
Google Earth/Maps

Google Earth is a 3D virtual globe browser application that superimposes satellite imagery onto the earth. Users view tours in which the globe is annotated with text, pictures, movies, placemarks and superimposed images. Google Earth Pro allows creation of “movie” tours through Google Earth, about any course-related topic. To use Google Earth, one must install the free Google Earth application on a local computer. See http://cit.duke.edu/tools/web20/gearth.html.

Recent developments in Google Maps, a related product, make Maps also extremely useful for teaching, and Maps is a totally web-based application requiring no software installation. See http://cit.duke.edu/tools/web20/gmaps.html.

Twitter

Twitter is social networking tool that allows you and your friends to send each other short, < 140 character messages (“tweets”) about what you’re doing, where you are, what you’re thinking at the time, and more. Tweets can be viewed and sent on a website, through your IM application, or via cell phone. You can set your tweets to be private (only those you allow to “follow” you can see them) or public. You can also subscribe to Twitter “bots” which send out periodic tweets about certain topics, and can set Twitter to follow certain words or phrases which appear in public tweets. By setting up a Twitter ID for a group, and having all members of the group follow it and each other, you can create, basically, a group IM function. See http://academhack.outsidethetext.com/home/2008/twitter-for-academia/.

Skitch (Mac)

Skitch is a (currently) free application that allows rapid grabbing of screen images, annotation of images with text and drawings, and saving or embedding those images in other applications, emails, and more. See http://plasq.com.