APPARATUS TO ASSIST A USER WITH HOLDING A MOBILE DEVICE

BACKGROUND

[0001] The field of the present invention relates to accessories for hand-held mobile devices such as mobile phones and computer tablets. In particular, the field of the present invention relates to an apparatus that assists a user with holding a mobile device that has a front-facing display screen, where the user can hold the device in one hand while leaving the thumb of that hand, as well as the user's other hand, free to operate the mobile device.

[0002] Mobile devices, such as cellular phones or tablets, typically have front facing display screens, which can be a touch-screen. In addition, mobile devices typically include integral cases. In addition, some mobile device users purchase a secondary case that partially or entirely covers the mobile device's integral case and provides additional protection. Cases can be made with any material that is rigid enough to hold its shape and protect the components of the mobile device, but cases often are made of a sufficiently low-density material so as to minimize the weight added to the mobile device. Typical materials used in cases include metal, carbon fiber, and plastic.

[0003] A case, whether integral or secondary, has a rear-facing back portion that is positioned on the opposite side of the device from the display screen. The exterior surface of the back portion of the case faces away from the mobile device and toward the palm of the user's hand when the mobile device is held with a typical grip. The exterior surface can be smooth or otherwise have a low coefficient of friction that causes the device to be difficult to grip. In the alternative, some cases have an exterior surface that is textured or coated with a material that improves the user's ability to grip the case (e.g., rubber or leather). However, even with a textured or coated case, many users still find difficulty with gripping the mobile device, particularly when operating the mobile device while performing other tasks.

[0004] A wide variety of accessories are available for supporting the use of a hand-held device. However, conventional accessories generally rely on rigid designs that are not easily adjustable or customizable to a user's individual hand. Also, such designs typically do not provide for a smooth transition from holding the device in portrait orientation to holding it in a landscape orientation, without having to detach from and reattach the accessory to the mobile device.

SUMMARY

[0005] An apparatus to assist a user with holding a mobile device comprises a finger brace and a flexible member coupled to the finger brace at an intermediate point. The finger brace is sized and shaped to brace at least one finger on each of two opposed sides of the intermediate point.

[0006] The flexible member extends through a hole in the back portion of the mobile device's case and is anchored to the interior surface of the back portion of the case.

[0007] The length of the flexible member between the hole and the finger brace is such that at least two fingers of a user's hand can press against the finger brace to brace the mobile device when the user is holding the mobile device in a fashion where at least two fingers of the same hand are positioned between the finger brace and the case.

[0008] The apparatus facilitates one-handed use of the mobile device by allowing the user to hold the mobile device with one hand while leaving the thumb of the user's same hand free to operate the mobile device.

[0009] Objects and advantages pertaining to an apparatus to assist a user with holding a mobile device may become apparent upon referring to the example embodiments illustrated in the drawings and disclosed in the following written description or appended claims.

[0010] This summary is provided to introduce a selection of concepts in a simplified form that are further described below in the Detailed Description. This Summary is not intended to identify key features or essential features of the claimed subject matter, nor is it intended to be used as an aid in determining the scope of the claimed subject matter.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] Figs. 1A and 1B are side views of an embodiment of the apparatus.

[0012] Fig. 1C is a perspective view of the embodiment of Figs. 1A and 1B.

[0013] Figs. 2A and 2B are perspective views of the interior surface of the rear-facing back portion of a case and the portion of the flexible member extending through the hole, as used with various embodiments of the apparatus, which could be combined with the embodiments in Figs. 1A-1C.

[0014] Figs. 3A and 3B are cross-sectional and side views of an additional example embodiment.

[0015] Figs. 4A-4E show an additional embodiment used with a case having slot-type holes.

[0016] Fig. 5 is an exploded perspective view of a case and a skin covering the case, as used with the embodiment of Figs. 4A-4E.

[0017] Fig. 6 is a perspective view of an additional embodiment used with a case having a plurality of holes.

[0018] Figs. 7A and 7C are perspective views showing an additional example embodiment used with a case having ridges on the exterior surface of the case.

[0019] Fig. 7B is a side view showing the embodiment of Figs. 7A and 7C.

[0020] Fig. 8 is a perspective view showing an additional embodiment used with a case having ridges.

[0021] Fig. 9 is a perspective view of an additional embodiment used with a case that has a recess in the exterior surface.

[0022] Figs. 10A and 10B show an additional embodiment with a finger brace that enables adjustment of the length of the flexible member.

[0023] Figs. 11A, 11B, and 11C are perspective and side views of an additional embodiment with a finger brace that enables adjustment of the length of the flexible member.

[0024] Figs. 12A and 12B are perspective views showing an additional embodiment where the finger brace can be used as a stand.

[0025] Fig. 13 shows an additional embodiment in which the finger brace can be used as a belt clip.

[0026] Fig. 14 is a perspective view showing an additional embodiment with a flexible member having multiple sections.

[0027] Fig. 15 is a perspective view showing an embodiment being held by a user's hand.

[0028] Figs. 16 and 17 are perspective views showing additional embodiments with the finger brace having a strap partially enclosing the user's fingers.

[0029] Fig. 18 is a perspective view showing the embodiment of Fig. 15 with the user holding the mobile device using an alternative grip.

[0030] Fig. 19 is a perspective view showing an embodiment in which the finger brace can be used as a stand.

[0031] Fig. 20 is a cross-sectional view showing another embodiment in which the finger brace can be used as a stand.

[0032] Fig. 21 shows an embodiment where a sleeve on the case enables adjustment of the length of the flexible member.

[0033] Fig. 22 shows a side view of the embodiment depicted in Fig. 21.

[0034] It should be noted that the embodiments depicted are shown only schematically, and that not all features may be shown in full detail or in proper proportion. Certain features or structures may be exaggerated relative to others for clarity. It should be noted further that the embodiments shown are examples only, and should not be construed as limiting the scope of the present disclosure or appended claims.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS

[0035] An example apparatus to assist with holding a mobile device is shown in Figs. 1A, 1B, and 1C. The example apparatus includes finger brace 20 and flexible member 30 coupled to the finger brace at intermediate point 40. The flexible member extends through hole 50 in the rear-facing back portion 60 of the mobile device's case 100 and is anchored to the interior surface 80 of the back portion 60 of the case 100. The exterior surface 70 of the rear-facing back portion 60 of case 100 is visible in Figs. 1A, 1B, and 1C, but interior surface 80 is shown only in other drawings.

perimeter of the finger-bracing surface can be rectangular, as shown in Fig. 1C, or can take other suitable shapes (e.g., triangular, circular, elliptical, hour-glass, or figure-8). The shape can be formed as an ornament or specialty shape, such as to assist marketing campaigns; such shapes can depict an object, animal, or company logo, for example. Alternatively, ornamental designs can be added to the shape with markings or engraving.

[0043] Fig. 1B shows flexible member 30 coupled to finger brace 20 at intermediate point 40. Intermediate point 40 can be equidistant from the end points of finger-bracing surface 25, as shown, or can be positioned at a non-central point on finger-bracing surface 25, but whether central or not, it can be sized to leave enough space so that at least one finger can fit on each of two opposed sides of intermediate point 40. The radius of the average adult finger is between about 0.5 and about 1.5 centimeters. The intermediate point can be positioned so that less than a length approximating the radius of the average adult finger is provided on each of two opposed sides of the intermediate point, although such a configuration can cause user discomfort, particularly when a user holds the mobile device for an extended period of time. Also, finger brace 20 can have adjustable size (e.g., by sliding, telescoping, folding, cutting, or breaking along pre-scored lines), or in some cases the intermediate point's location changed (e.g., by sliding or allowing the user to adjust it to one of several notched locations), so that the fit can be customized to the user.

[0044] Flexible member 30 can be made of various flexible materials, including but not limited to, cloth, leather, rubber, and plastic. In some embodiments, flexible member 30 can be made of a material that has a dynamic length (e.g., elastic or rubber). Such materials, when stretched, exert a resisting force. That force provides an extra gripping force, assisting the user to hold the device in the user's hand. The resistive force provided by such a material's dynamic length, combined with the flexibility of flexible member 30, allows flexible member 30 to be twisted and stretched to accommodate the user's hand size and preference. In addition, the more flexible member 30 is stretched, the more the resistive force attempts to return flexible member 30 to its unloaded length, causing the finger brace to be held more tightly against the user's fingers. Even if flexible member 30 is not made of an elastic material, though, so that it has a fixed length, correct establishment of the length of flexible member 30, with respect to the user's hand, facilitates easy one-handed handling of the mobile device while the user is operating it, because finger brace 20 can automatically angle itself to fit comfortably against the user's fingers, most commonly by balancing forces on either side of attachment point 40, accommodating a wide array of different user holds.

[0045] Also, in some embodiments, the elasticity of flexible member 30 can hold finger brace 20 against the exterior surface 70 of the rear-facing back portion 60 of the case 100 when not in use or facilitate the cantilevered hold shown in Fig. 18.

[0053] In the embodiment shown in Fig. 2A, a hook-type fastener is shown on anchoring device 210 and corresponding loops on anchoring surface 220 on interior surface 80 of rear-facing back portion 60 of case 100. Use of adjustable fasteners, such as hook and loop, snaps, clips, or the like, can enable an individual user to adjust the length of flexible member 30 and thus customize the apparatus to fit his or her hand. In the embodiment of Fig. 2A, for example, a user can decrease the length of flexible member 30 by detaching anchor device 210 from anchoring surface 220 and re-attaching anchoring device 210 at a point farther from hole 50. Conversely, a user can increase the length of flexible member 30 by re-attaching anchoring device 210 at a point nearer to hole 50.

[0054] In other embodiments, flexible member 30 can be held in place between interior surface 80 of the rear-facing back portion 60 of case 100 and an adjacent surface (not shown) of the mobile device, e.g., by creating a pressure fit. In an embodiment that uses a pressure-fit anchor design, both anchoring device 210 on flexible member 30, and anchoring surface 220 on the interior surface 80 of the rear-facing back portion 60 of case 100, can be made of or coated with a non-slip material (e.g., rubber or silicone) to prevent the flexible member from slipping out of the hole. Anchoring surface 220 on the interior surface 80 of the rear-facing back portion 60 of case 100 can be integral to case 100 or can be applied to interior surface 80 of the rear-facing back portion 60 of case 100, for example with adhesive.

[0055] Anchoring device 210 can be permanently attached to flexible member 30, e.g., by glue or stitching, or anchoring device 210 can be repositionable at different points along the length of flexible member 30, such as by use of a buckle (not shown) or another repositionable fastener.

[0056] Figs. 3A and 3B show an embodiment in which anchoring device 210 is permanently attached to flexible member 30. In this embodiment, anchoring device 210 includes a first plurality of teeth or projections 315. A second plurality of teeth 325 is arranged on anchoring surface 220. The first and second pluralities of teeth 315 and 325 interlock when the rear-facing back portion 60 of the case 100 is adjacent to the mobile device, thereby anchoring flexible member 30 to interior surface 80 of the rear-facing back portion 60 of case 100.

[0057] In certain example embodiments, the rear-facing back portion of the case (or the anchoring surface if one is used) can include one or more magnets (not shown), and the finger brace can have corresponding magnets aligned so as to exert an attractive force on the magnet of the case, so that together they are capable of holding the finger brace to the exterior surface of the rear-facing back portion of the case when the finger brace is not in use. Alternatively, the case can have clips, clasps, snaps, or other fasteners that hold the finger brace in place on the case's exterior surface. Such magnets or other fasteners can be integral to the case or applied to a surface of the case, for example with adhesive.

[0065] The embodiment shown in Figs. 4A-4E has slot-type holes 400 and 401 that are significantly wider than the width of flexible member 30, which allows the user to slide flexible member 30 parallel to the lengthwise direction of holes 400 and 401. Figs. 4D and 4E show close-ups of slot-type hole 400, with flexible member 30 positioned to the left side of slot-type hole 400 in Fig. 4D and to the right side of slot-type hole 400 in Fig. 4E. For example, if the user intends to hold the mobile device in his or her left hand, flexible member 30 used with an embodiment that has a wide hole can be positioned closer to the right side of the rear-facing back portion 60 of the case 100 when viewing the case from the rear. Other embodiments can include a hole (not shown) that extends along the vertical axis of the case when held in portrait orientation, thus allowing the user to reposition the flexible member up or down.

[0066] The embodiment shown in Figs. 4A and 4B includes anchoring device 210 (on flexible member 30), which includes a plurality of parallel of ridges 410 running orthogonally to the length of flexible member 30. What is described in other embodiments as anchoring surface 220 on the interior surface 80 of the rear-facing back portion 60 of case 100, is in the case of Figs. 4A and 4B a plurality of ridges 420 that run parallel to elongated holes 400 and 401. Ridges 410 and 420 interlock when the interior surface 80 of rear-facing back portion 60 of case 100 is adjacent to the mobile device. Ridges 410 and 420 prevent the anchoring device 210 on the flexible member 30 from slipping through slot-type holes 400 and 401. In addition, ridges 410 and 420 allow anchoring device 210 and flexible member 30 to slide within slot-type holes 400 and 401. An additional advantage of ridges 410 and 420 is that the effective length of flexible member 30 can be adjusted by repositioning anchoring device 210 closer to or farther from slot-type holes 400 and 401. To assist in that goal, ridges 410 and 420 can have different numbers of ridges; for example, in Figs. 4A and 4B, there are fewer ridges 410 than ridges 420, allowing movement of anchoring device 210 to different portions of the set of ridges 420, with all ridges 410 still engaged with corresponding ones of ridges 420.

[0067] In Fig. 4B, anchoring device 210 has flexible member attachment surface 475 and a skid surface 485 on its back side, i.e., the side opposite ridges 410. Flexible member attachment surface 475 is attached to flexible member 30 by a hook and loop fastener. Such an adjustable fastener allows for a minor adjustment to the effective length of flexible member 30 by adjusting how much of flexible member 30 is attached to anchoring device 210. Skid surface 485, in the view of Fig. 4B, rises above the flexible member attachment surface 475 to an elevation greater than the thickness of flexible member 30, thereby allowing anchoring device 210 to slide laterally, along ridges 420 and along hole 400 or hole 401, with relative ease, because skid surface 485 will slide readily against the flat back surface of the mobile device when case 100 is placed on the back of the mobile device, even though anchoring device 210 is fitted between case 100 and the mobile device.

mechanism and allow the length to be adjusted. The locking mechanism can have second release button 1004 (see Fig. 10B) depressed simultaneously with release button 1003.

[0076] Figs. 21 and 22 show an embodiment with sleeve 2100 that is coupled to case 100 but is capable of sliding in the longer dimension of case 100. Sleeve 2100 can slide, for example, on rails or grooves 2195 in case 100, and a locking mechanism (not shown) can prevent sleeve 2100 from sliding relative to case 100 when sleeve 2100 is positioned in the desired location. The locking mechanism can be disengaged by pressing lock release button 2175. In the embodiment shown, sleeve 2100 contains hole 2150. Fig. 21 depicts a portion of flexible member 30 beneath sleeve 2100 that runs between hole 50 in case 100 and hole 2150 in sleeve 2100. Hole 50 and the portion of flexible member 30 that runs between hole 50 and hole 2150 are shown in dashed lines to indicate that they lie beneath sleeve 2100. Sliding sleeve 2100 relative to case 100 allows the user to reposition the effective anchoring point of flexible member 30 (i.e., where flexible member 30 couples to case 100) while shortening or lengthening the effective length of flexible member 30.

[0077] Fig. 22 shows the embodiment of Fig. 21 in side view. A rail or groove 2195 is shown on the side of case 100, but other embodiments show a similar rail or groove on the front-facing portion of case 100. In still further embodiments, no rails or grooves are used, rather sleeve 2100 simply wraps around the front-facing portion of case 100 to grip case 100 without obscuring any portion of the front-facing display screen.

[0078] Figs. 11A, 11B, and 11C show an embodiment where finger brace 200 includes a buckle that allows adjustment of the length of flexible member 30. Fig. 11A shows buckle-type finger brace 200 in an open position. Flexible member 30 is routed through first slot 1101 and second slot 1102 in the finger brace's lower portion 1115 and connected to the finger brace's upper portion 1125. First slot 1101 is at intermediate point 40. Clasp member 1130 on upper portion 1125 engages with one of a plurality of clasping holes 1135 in lower portion 1115. The plurality of clasping holes 1135 allows the length of flexible member 30 to be adjusted. Upper portion 1125 can have retaining surface 1145 to provide extra hold to maintain the selected length of flexible member 30.

[0079] Fig. 11B shows a cross-sectional view of an embodiment with buckle-type finger brace 200 in a closed position. Fig 11C shows a similar embodiment in cross section with buckle-type finger brace 200 in the open position.

[0080] Figs. 12A and 12B depict an example embodiment where finger brace 20 can be used as a stand. In some embodiments, a tab or projection on finger brace 20 can be placed into hole 50 (as shown in Fig. 20). However, in the example embodiment shown in Fig 12A, finger brace 20 as a whole is fitted into notch or indentation 1210 in the exterior surface 70 of the rear-facing back portion 60 of case 100. The stand can be used to support the mobile device in either portrait or landscape

orientation. The exterior surface 70 of the rear-facing back portion 60 of case 100 can be equipped with a second notch or indentation 1220, which allows finger brace 20 to engage the exterior surface 70 at a different angle than when the first notch or indentation 1210 is used. The difference in the angle will increase or decrease the angle at which the mobile device is held off of the desk or other flat surface, depending on whether portrait or landscape mode is used. A wider angle used in landscape mode will create a wider angle between the mobile device and the flat surface. On the other hand, a wider angle in portrait mode will result in a narrower angle between the mobile device and the flat surface. Notches 1210 and 1220 can instead be near different edges of the mobile device, at 90 degrees from each other, thus alternatively allowing for support in both landscape and portrait mode.

[0081] Fig. 19 shows an alternative embodiment where finger brace 20 can be used as a stand. Although Fig. 19 shows the stand orienting the mobile device in portrait mode, the features discussed here could be located differently, so as to allow the stand to orient the mobile device in landscape mode instead. In the example embodiment of Fig. 19, exterior surface 70 of rear-facing back portion 60 of case 100 includes tab 1900. Tab 1900 may be rigid or completely pliable. In certain embodiments, tab 1900 may be pliable, in which case it lies flush with exterior surface 70 until it is peeled back by the user. Slot 1910 is formed in case 100 just below tab 1900. One end of finger brace 20 can be inserted into slot 1910, allowing finger brace 20 to act as a stand for the mobile device. Some embodiments may include projections 1945 on the ends of finger brace 20, which provide additional stability for finger brace 20 when it is acting as a stand. Projections 1945 form a complementary shape to tab 1900, allowing the end of finger brace 20 that is inserted into slot 1910 to mate with the shape of tab 1900 so as to facilitate the end of finger brace 20 being retained in slot 1910. In addition, optional matching projections 1955, on the opposite end of finger brace 20, can add stability by acting as feet. In the case where the stand can hold the mobile device in the opposite direction, such as if the stand is designed to orient the mobile device in landscape mode with either edge at the top, then projections 1955 can swap locations with projections 1945 to achieve the opposite orientation. If tab 1900 and slot 1910 are positioned off-center or angled, it may be desired to have another tab/slot pair (not shown) at a transposed location to assist in reversing the orientation.

[0082] Fig. 20 shows a cross-sectional view of a different embodiment, also in which finger brace 20 can act as a stand, but in this embodiment, finger brace 20 is inserted into hole 50, rather than needing a dedicated slot. The embodiment of Fig. 20 depicts projection 2010, which can be a section of exterior surface 70 of rear-facing back portion 60 of case 100 that is raised above the rest of exterior surface 70, thereby providing extra depth to hole 50 to receive finger brace 20. In addition, projection 2010 can create room to accommodate anchoring device 210 (discussed above) within case 100. In

embodiments having relatively wide slot-type holes such as holes 400 and 401 shown in Fig. 4C, projection 2010 also provides sufficient volume to allow flexible member 30 to slide along the hole.

[0083] Fig. 13 shows an example embodiment in which finger brace 20 can be used as a belt clip. A first edge 1301 of finger brace 20 is fitted over an edge of a belt, a waist of a pair of pants, an edge of a shirt pocket, or the like. In some embodiments where finger brace 20 is used as a clip, the arrangement would cause flexible member 30 to rest against the edge of the material to which the embodiment is clipped, and that would, in turn, pull finger brace 20 against that material, thus clipping the mobile device in place. However, when finger brace 20 is clipped over a belt, the weight of the mobile device can cause the upper end of the mobile device to rotate downward. Such a configuration can cause the mobile device to be held at an outward angle, thereby giving a greater chance of the device falling or pulling the belt or shirt pocket.

[0084] In the embodiment depicted in Fig. 13, the edge of finger brace 20 opposite first edge 1301 can be placed into pocket 1302 near the hole. Embodiments that include such a pocket prevent the mobile device from rotating outward, allowing the weight of the mobile device to rest more directly on top of the belt or shirt pocket. First edge 1301 of finger brace 20 can be covered with metal or another hard material to prevent wear and to guide the finger brace over the belt.

[0085] It is intended that equivalents of the disclosed example embodiments and methods shall fall within the scope of the present disclosure or appended claims. It is intended that the disclosed example embodiments and methods, and equivalents thereof, can be modified while remaining within the scope of the present disclosure or appended claims.

[0086] In the foregoing Detailed Description, various features can be grouped together in several example embodiments for the purpose of streamlining the disclosure. This method of disclosure is not to be interpreted as reflecting an intention that any claimed embodiment requires more features than are expressly recited in the corresponding claim. Rather, as the appended claims reflect, inventive subject matter may lie in less than all features of a single disclosed example embodiment. Thus, the appended claims are hereby incorporated into the Detailed Description, with each claim standing on its own as a separate disclosed embodiment. However, the present disclosure shall also be construed as implicitly disclosing any embodiment having any suitable set of one or more disclosed or claimed features (*i.e.*, a set of features that are neither incompatible nor mutually exclusive) that appear in the present disclosure or the appended claims, including those sets that may not be explicitly disclosed herein. It should be further noted that the scope of the appended claims does not necessarily encompass the whole of the subject matter disclosed herein.

[0087] For purposes of the present disclosure and appended claims, the conjunction “or” is to be construed inclusively (*e.g.*, “a dog or a cat” would be interpreted as “a dog, or a cat, or both”; *e.g.*, “a

Claims:

1. An apparatus to assist a user with holding a mobile device having (i) a front-facing display screen and (ii) a case with a rear-facing back portion, wherein the back portion of the case has (i) an exterior surface, (ii) an interior surface, and (iii) a hole through the back portion of the case, the apparatus comprising:

(a) a finger brace; and

(b) an elastic member (i) anchored to the interior surface of the back portion of the case, (ii) extending through the hole, and (iii) coupled to the finger brace at an intermediate point;

(c) wherein the finger brace is sized and shaped (i) to brace at least one finger on each of two opposed sides of the intermediate point, and (ii) so that a first end of the finger brace can be held in the hole; and

(d) wherein the length of the elastic member between the hole and the finger brace is such that:

(i) at least two fingers of one hand of the user can press against the finger brace to brace the mobile device when the one hand is holding the mobile device and the at least two fingers are between the finger brace and the exterior surface of the back portion of the case; and

(ii) when the first end of the finger brace is in the hole, the elastic member holds the finger brace in tension against the case with a second end of the finger brace spaced from the case;

whereby the apparatus both (A) facilitates one-handed use of the mobile device by allowing the user to hold the mobile device while leaving a thumb of the one hand free to operate the mobile device and (B) forms a stand allowing use of the mobile device without holding the mobile device.

2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the portion of the elastic member extending through the hole comprises an anchoring device coupled to the elastic member.

3. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising a clip coupled to the finger brace and configured to retain a portion of the elastic member, whereby the length of the elastic member is adjustable by increasing and decreasing the portion of the elastic member retained by the clip.

4. An apparatus to assist a user with holding a mobile device having a front-facing display screen, the apparatus comprising:

(a) a finger brace;

(b) a case with a rear-facing back portion having (i) an exterior surface, (ii) an interior surface, (iii) a hole through the back portion of the case, and (iv) a recess sized to hold a first end of the finger brace; and

(c) an elastic member (i) anchored to the interior surface of the back portion of the case, (ii) extending through the hole, and (iii) coupled to the finger brace at an intermediate point;

(d) wherein the finger brace is sized and shaped to brace at least one finger on each of two opposed sides of the intermediate point; and

(e) wherein the length of the elastic member between the hole and the finger brace is such that:

(i) at least two fingers of one hand of the user can press against the finger brace to brace the mobile device when the one hand is holding the mobile device and the at least two fingers are between the finger brace and the exterior surface of the back portion of the case; and

(ii) when the first end of the finger brace is in the recess, the elastic member holds the finger brace in tension against the case with a second end of the finger brace spaced from the case;

whereby the apparatus both (A) facilitates one-handed use of the mobile device by allowing the user to hold the mobile device while leaving a thumb of the one hand free to operate the mobile device and (B) forms a stand allowing use of the mobile device without holding the mobile device.

5. The apparatus of claim 4 wherein the exterior surface of the rear-facing back portion of the case includes a structure that extends orthogonally from the exterior surface to a distance that is substantially equal to or greater than a dimension extending orthogonally from the exterior surface of the case occupied by the finger brace when it is adjacent to the exterior surface of the rear-facing back portion of the case.

6. The apparatus of claim 4 further comprising:

(a) a tab disposed on an edge of the finger brace;

(b) the recess and the tab are of corresponding shapes so that, when the tab is inserted into the recess, the finger brace extends from the exterior surface at an acute angle.

7. A method of using an apparatus to assist a user with holding a mobile device having a front-facing display screen and a case with a rear-facing back portion, wherein the back portion of the case has (1) an exterior surface, (2) an interior surface, and (3) a hole through the back portion of the case, the apparatus comprising:

(A) a finger brace; and

(B) an elastic member (1) anchored to the interior surface of the back portion of the case, (2) extending through the hole, and (3) coupled to the finger brace at an intermediate point;

(C) wherein the finger brace is sized and shaped (i) to brace at least one finger on each of two opposed sides of the intermediate point, and (ii) so that a first end of the finger brace can be held in the hole; and

(D) wherein the length of the flexible member between the hole and the finger brace is such that:

(1) at least two fingers of one hand of the user can press against the finger brace to brace the mobile device when the one hand is holding the mobile device and the at least two fingers are between the finger brace and the exterior surface of the back portion of the case; and

(2) when the first end of the finger brace is in the hole, the elastic member holds the finger brace in tension against the case with a second end of the finger brace spaced from the case;

the method comprising:

(a) inserting at least one finger between the finger brace and the exterior surface of the rear-facing back portion of the case;

(b) bracing the at least one finger against the finger brace; and

(c) operating the mobile device with a thumb of the one hand;

(d) inserting the first end of the finger brace in the hole with the second end of the finger brace is spaced from the case; and

(e) placing the mobile device on a flat surface, using the apparatus as a stand.

8. The method of claim 7 further comprising:

(A) inserting at least one additional finger between the finger brace and the exterior surface of the rear-facing back portion of the case; and

(B) bracing the at least one additional finger against the finger brace;

(C) wherein the at least one finger and the at least one additional finger are on opposite sides of the elastic member.

9. An apparatus to assist a user with holding a mobile device having a front-facing display screen and a rear-facing back, the apparatus also forming a stand for the mobile device, the apparatus comprising:

(a) a case couplable to the mobile device and covering at least part of the back of the mobile device;

(b) a finger brace; and

(c) an elastic member anchored to the case and coupled to the finger brace;

(d) wherein the case has a recess sized to hold a first end of the finger brace; and

(e) wherein the finger brace and the elastic member are configured, including the length of the elastic member between the case and the finger brace, so that:

(i) when one hand of a user is holding the mobile device, at least one finger of the one hand can press against the finger brace and place the elastic member under tension to brace the mobile device, and

(ii) when the first end of the finger brace is in the recess, the elastic member holds the finger brace in tension against the case with a second end of the finger brace spaced from the case;

whereby the apparatus both (A) facilitates one-handed use of the mobile device by allowing the user to hold the mobile device while leaving a thumb of the one hand free to operate the mobile device and (B) forms a stand allowing use of the mobile device without holding the mobile device.

10. The apparatus of claim 9 further comprising a clip coupled to the finger brace and configured to retain a portion of the elastic member, whereby the length of the elastic member is adjustable by increasing and decreasing the portion of the elastic member retained by the clip.

11. The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the case is an integral part of the mobile device.

12. The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the case is a secondary case that is not an integral part of the mobile device.

13 The apparatus of claim 12 wherein the secondary case covers only a portion of the back of the mobile device.

14. The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the case is contoured so that a first portion of the case extends away from the mobile device to a distance at least as great as the sum of (i) a distance that a second portion of the case extends away from the mobile device and (ii) a thickness of the finger brace, and wherein the case, the elastic member, and the finger brace are structured to allow the finger brace to be retracted adjacent to the second portion of the case, whereby, when the finger brace is thus retracted, the first portion of the case can support the mobile device on a flat surface with the display screen facing upward.
15. The apparatus of claim 14 wherein the first portion surrounds the second portion, so that the finger brace can be retracted into a cavity, and wherein, when the finger brace is retracted adjacent to the second portion of the case, surfaces of the first portion and of the finger brace farthest from the mobile device together form a substantially flat surface.
16. The apparatus of claim 9 wherein:
    (f) the recess comprises an indentation in the case;
    (g) the finger brace has a tab at the first end of the finger brace; and
    (h) the indentation and the tab are of complementary shapes.
17. A method of manipulating a mobile device having a front-facing display screen and a rear-facing back with aid of an apparatus comprising:

    1. a case couplable to the mobile device and covering at least part of the back of the mobile device;

    2. a finger brace; and

    3. an elastic member anchored to the case and coupled to the finger brace;

    4. wherein the case has a recess sized to hold a first end of the finger brace; and

    5. wherein the finger brace and the elastic member are configured, including the length of the elastic member between the case and the finger brace, so as:

(i) when one hand of a user is holding the mobile device, at least one finger of the one hand can press against the finger brace and place the elastic member under tension to brace the mobile device, and

(ii) when the first end of the finger brace is in the recess, to hold the finger brace in tension against the case with a second end of the finger brace spaced from the case;

the method comprising:

(a) inserting the at least one finger between the finger brace and the case;

(b) bracing the at least one finger against the finger brace;

(c) operating the mobile device with a thumb of the one hand;

(d) inserting the first end of the finger brace into the recess; and

(e) placing the mobile device on a flat surface, using the apparatus as a stand.

18. The method of claim 17 wherein inserting the at least one finger between the finger brace and the case comprises inserting a first finger on one side of the elastic member and a second finger on an opposite side of the elastic member.

19. The method of claim 17 wherein all fingers inserted between the finger brace and the case are placed only on one side of the elastic member, and further comprising, on the opposite side of the elastic member, holding at least another finger of the one hand against a surface of the finger brace farthest from the mobile device so as to press one end of the finger brace against the case.

20. The method of claim 17:

(f) wherein the apparatus further comprises a clip coupled to the finger brace and configured to retain a portion of the elastic member, and

(g) further comprising adjusting the length of the elastic member by changing the portion of the elastic member retained by the clip.