Title

stata.com

op_join — Row- and column-join operators

Syntax

a , *b*

a \ *b*

Description

, and \ are Mata's row-join and column-join operators.

Remarks and examples

stata.com

Remarks are presented under the following headings:

Comma and backslash are operators

That , and \ are operators cannot be emphasized enough. When one types

```
: (1, 2 \ 3, 4)
       1   2
    +---------+
  1 |  1   2  |
  2 |  3   4  |
    +---------+
```

one is tempted to think, "Ah, comma and backslash are how you separate elements when you enter a matrix." If you think like that, you will not appreciate the power of , and \.

, and \ are operators in the same way that * and + are operators.

, is the operator that takes a $r \times c_1$ matrix and a $r \times c_2$ matrix, and returns a $r \times (c_1 + c_2)$ matrix.

\ is the operator that takes a $r_1 \times c$ matrix and a $r_2 \times c$ matrix, and returns a $(r_1 + r_2) \times c$ matrix.

, and \ may be used with scalars, vectors, or matrices:

```
: a = (1 \ 2)
: b = (3 \ 4)
```

```
: a, b
       1   2
    +---------+
  1 |   1   3 |
  2 |   2   4 |
    +---------+

: c = (1, 2)
: d = (3, 4)
: c \ d
       1   2
    +---------+
  1 |   1   2 |
  2 |   3   4 |
    +---------+
```

, binds more tightly than \, meaning that $e, f \setminus g, h$ is interpreted as $(e, f) \setminus (g, h)$. In this, , and \ are no different from * and + operators: * binds more tightly than + and $e*f + g*h$ is interpreted as $(e*f)+(g*h)$.

Just as it sometimes makes sense to type $e*(f+g)*h$, it can make sense to type $e, (f \setminus g), h$:

```
: e = 1 \ 2
: f = 5 \ 6
: g = 3
: h = 4
: e,(g\h),f
       1   2   3
    +-------------+
  1 |   1   3   5 |
  2 |   2   4   6 |
    +-------------+
```

Comma as a separator

, has a second meaning in Mata: it is the argument separator for functions. When you type

```
: myfunc(a, b)
```

the comma that appears inside the parentheses is not the comma row-join operator; it is the comma argument separator. If you wanted to call `myfunc()` with second argument equal to row vector `(1,2)`, you must type

```
: myfunc(a, (1,2))
```

and not

```
: myfunc(a, 1, 2)
```

because otherwise Mata will think you are trying to pass three arguments to `myfunc()`. When you open another set of parentheses inside a function's argument list, comma reverts to its usual row-join meaning.

Warning about the misuse of comma and backslash operators

Misuse or mere overuse of , and \ can substantially reduce the speed with which your code executes. Consider the actions Mata must take when you code, say,

```
a \ b
```

First, Mata must allocate a matrix or vector containing `rows(`*a*`)+rows(`*b*`)` rows, then it must copy *a* into the new matrix or vector, and then it must copy *b*. Nothing inefficient has happened yet, but now consider

```
(a \ b) \ c
```

Picking up where we left off, Mata must allocate a matrix or vector containing `rows(`*a*`)+rows(`*b*`)+rows(`*c*`)` rows, then it must copy `(`*a* `\` *b*`)` into the new matrix or vector, and then it must copy *c*. Something inefficient just happened: *a* was copied twice!

Coding

```
res = (a \ b) \ c
```

is convenient, but execution would be quicker if we coded

```
res = J(rows(a)+rows(b)+rows(c), cols(a), .)
res[1,.] = a
res[2,.] = b
res[3,.] = c
```

We do not want to cause you concern where none is due. In general, you would not be able to measure the difference between the more efficient code and coding *res* `= (`*a* `\` *b*`) \` *c*. But as the number of row or column operators stack up, the combined result becomes more and more inefficient. Even that is not much of a concern. If the inefficient construction itself is buried in a loop, however, and that loop is executed thousands of times, the inefficiency can become important.

With a little thought, you can always substitute predeclaration using `J()` (see [M-5] **J( )**) and assignment via subscripting.

Conformability

a,*b*:

a:	$r \times c_1$
b:	$r \times c_2$
result:	$r \times (c_1 + c_2)$

a \ *b*:

a:	$r_1 \times c$
b:	$r_2 \times c$
result:	$(r_1 + r_2) \times c$

Diagnostics

, and \ abort with error if *a* and *b* are not of the same broad type.

Also see

[M-2] **exp** — Expressions

[M-2] **intro** — Language definition