

**op\_join** — Row- and column-join operators

[Description](#)    [Syntax](#)    [Remarks and examples](#)    [Conformability](#)  
[Diagnostics](#)    [Also see](#)

## Description

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

## Syntax

$$a , b$$

$$a \setminus b$$

## Remarks and examples

[stata.com](#)

Remarks are presented under the following headings:

*Comma and backslash are operators*

*Comma as a separator*

*Warning about the misuse of comma and backslash operators*

### Comma and backslash are operators

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

```
: (1, 2 \ 3, 4)
```

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,

$$a \setminus b$$

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

$$(a \setminus b) \setminus c$$

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 \setminus b)` into the new matrix or vector, and then it must copy `c`. Something inefficient just happened: `a` was copied twice!

Coding

$$res = (a \setminus b) \setminus c$$

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 \setminus b) \setminus 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

$a, b$ :

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

$a \setminus b$ :

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

## 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