Good Writing Practice

Syntactic punctuation distraction
Slash: usage and misusage

Introduction
In research writing, non-distracting usage of the slash are (1) “per”, (2) semantic synonyms, (3) alternatives, and (4) possibly parts of a whole.

Non-distracting slash usage

(1) Per
Example
Moles/hr/skin
Notes
The most explicit and conventional usage of the slash is to symbolise the mathematical-like prepositional meaning of per as in a numerator-to-denominator relation.

(2) Semantic Synonyms
Example
Solidus/virgule
Notes
Each term on either side of the slash is acknowledged to be an equivalent of the other. Being equivalent to the equal sign, the slash is often applied when the nomenclature is undecided for a recently identified entity.

(3) Alternatives
Example
And/or
Notes
The protein occurs in the cytoplasm and/or the nucleus vs. the wordy: the protein occurs in the cytoplasm, the nucleus, or both.

(4) Parts of a whole
Example
0.5 M NaOH/0.5 M NaCl
Notes
The slash denotes the presence of NaCl in the solution, being equivalent to and, containing, or plus.

Slash misusage
In contrast to non-distracting slash usage, there are distracting examples of slash misusage: (5) contrasting abstractions, (6) inexplicit coordinating conjunction and, and (7) inexplicit inclusive conjunction or.

(5) Contrasting Abstractions
Example
(Results section: results statement)
A venous/arterial concentration difference was observed for plasma free fatty acids.
Revision
A venous-to-arterial concentration difference was observed for plasma free fatty acids.
Notes
The contrasting to meaning, as in cell/cell interaction, effectively conveys a tangible physical relation. But in the example, this meaning is inexplicit when the contrasting constituents are intangible as in venous/arterial. In the Revision, the athwart (i.e., on both sides) hyphenated “to” is explicit.

(6) Inexplicit coordinating conjunction “and”
Example
(Methods section)
At each physician appointment, blood/urine tests were performed.
Revision
At each physician appointment, a blood and a urine test were performed.
Notes
In the example, it is confusing whether there is more than one test for blood and for urine. The coordinating conjunction and is clearer by focusing on individuality. Furthermore, the repeated a avoids the unintended plural meaning tests.

(7) Inexplicit inclusive conjunction “or”
Example
(Introduction section: research objective)
In this study, the Tinto model and other derived models are reviewed to understand freshman persistence/exit from two-year colleges.
Revision
In this study, the Tinto model and other derived models are reviewed to understand freshman persistence or exit from two-year colleges.
Notes
This usage of the slash is intended to convey that instances of persistence and exit each occur, but as alternatives. However, the relation between opposite alternatives is confusing, compared with slash demarcation of synonyms, justifying usage of the inclusive coordinating conjunction or. A frequent example of the inclusive or is when a moderator of a meeting asks the attendees whether there are any questions or comments. The moderator is not saying an attendee can only ask a question or state a comment (the exclusive or) for which either … or would be explicit.

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