Slashes

Despite its popularity, the slash (/), technically known as a *virgule*, is frowned upon by purists. Other than to indicate dates (*9/11/2001*) or to separate lines of poetry ("Celery, raw / Develops the jaw"), it has few defensible uses.

Usually a hyphen, or in some cases the word *or*, will suffice. Instead of writing *the novelist/poet Eve Jones*, make it *the novelist-poet Eve Jones*. Rather than *available to any man/woman who is qualified*, make it *any man or woman*.

The slash has always been a handy tool for taking notes and writing rough outlines. Substituting *w/o* for *without*, *y/o* for *years old*, and *b/c* for *because* can save valuable time and space.

However, most slashes can—and should—be removed from a final draft. Writers should replace a construction like *any man/woman* with *any man or woman* in their finished work.

"The virgule is a mark that doesn't appear much in first-rate writing," says Bryan A. Garner in *A Dictionary of Modern American Usage*. "Use it as a last resort."