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## Should I say 'advantages of' something or 'advantages to' something?

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That is a good question.

The word *advantage* has a number of connected meanings which are subtly different.

Meaning 1: Something which brings you more success and opportunity. For example, *the advantages of/to a good education*

Meaning 2: A benefit or gain (or profit). For example, *It is an advantage to have money.*

Meaning 3: Superiority. For example, *He has the advantage over me because of his better education.*

This is usually not problematic so the following focuses on the *of-* and *to-*constructions where there are real problems.

Which form follows the word *advantage* is dependent on the meaning we want to express.

### Style

Stylistically, *advantage to* is slightly more formal. For example,

1. *Tell me about the advantages of living in Paris*
2. *Tell me about the advantages to living in Paris.*

Both of these fall into meaning 1 and imply simply that you gain some opportunity by living in Paris which you would not otherwise have. Sentence 2 is more formal but the meaning is equivalent.

The expression *advantage to* is usually used with a gerund (as in *the advantages to communicating clearly*) but *of* instead of *to* in that sentence would not be wrong at all. When the expression is followed by a simple noun, rather than a gerund, e.g., *One of the advantages of winter is that there are fewer tourists in town*, then the *of*-construction is usually preferred. It would sound slightly too formal, in conversation at least, to say *One of the advantages to winter is that there are fewer tourists in town* but it would not be wrong.

The *to*-construction is often preferred with the plural form, *advantages and disadvantages to ...*, but, again, *of* would not be wrong.

Meaning is unaffected in either case and nobody would complain about either use.

However, even here, notice that you can only have one of these:

3. *There are advantages to living in Paris*
4. *\*There are advantages of living in Paris.*

When we use the existential *there are* formulation, only the *to*-construction works because we have a dummy subject which is not a noun. More of that to come.

### Gain vs. inherent quality

If *advantage* is used to mean gain or profit to somebody or something, then the *to*-construction is the only possibility. For example, you cannot have *\*It is an advantage of the country to be in the European Union*. In cases like this, only *advantage to* is possible because we need to show who gains. It is, of course, possible to say *The many advantages of being in the EU* but in this case the meaning is slightly different (something leading to opportunities for success, not the success itself).

In meaning 2, *advantage* is often followed by an infinitive with *to*. For example, *It is an advantage to have enough money*. Here we are using the word to mean something like *a good thing or a gain, a profit* etc. Naturally, because this is the infinitive with *to*, no *of*-construction is allowed.

We can use the *of*-construction to define the advantage we mean. Just as we can have *John's ideas*, we can have *The ideas of John*. Similarly, we can use this pseudo-possessive structure with

*advantage* and speak of *the advantages of Paris* as if we were referring to *Paris's advantages*. Here, it would be wrong to speak of *the advantages to Paris* because that would carry a different meaning. It would mean Paris is **getting** an advantage from another source rather than **having** the advantage. We can, similarly, have *one advantage of Paris* when we mean *one of Paris's advantages* but that is not talking about Paris **gaining** something but Paris **having** something.

## Summary

If you use *advantage* to mean that someone or something is **gaining**, then the *to*-construction is the obvious choice. If you use *advantage* to mean **having or possessing superiority or benefits**, then the *of*-construction is the usual choice.

Here are some more examples:

5. *The advantage of this candidate is that he clearly has more experience than the other applicants*
6. *The advantage to this candidate is that he clearly has more experience than the other applicants*

These could mean slightly different things:

Sentence 5 can only mean the candidate **has or possesses** an advantage over the others by virtue of his experience (an inherent quality of the candidate).

Sentence 6 can mean the same more formally.

Sentence 6 can also mean that the other applicants' lack of experience is **giving** the candidate an advantage.

Therefore, we would have *the advantage of this product, the advantage of living in the city* etc. in preference to the *to*-construction in most cases.

## Getting it right

You can check whether you have the right formulation by rephrasing the sentence using a possessive or inherent quality expression. Here's how:

7. *There are advantages to living in Paris. One is that there are many cultural events.*

Here there is no way to re-phrase the first sentence using a possessive such as *Paris's* so the *to*-construction is valid. There is no subject noun phrase to form the basis of the possessive because *there* is not a noun.

8. *It is an advantage to be living in Paris that there are many cultural events.*

Here, too, you cannot substitute a possessive form because we have the non-finite verb construction *to be living* so this is the only possible form.

9. *The advantages of living in Paris are that you have many cultural opportunities and the restaurants are great.*

Here, although it is very odd, it is structurally possible to substitute something like, *Living in Paris's advantages include having access to many cultural events and great restaurants*. The noun phrase *living in Paris* can be made to be possessive just as any noun phrase can.

10. *An advantage of living in Paris is that there are many cultural events.*

Here, again, there is a noun phrase that can be made possessive so the *of*-construction is valid.

Finally, note that in sentences 9 and 10, it is possible to replace *of* with *to* with an increase in formality but you cannot replace *to* with *of* in sentences 7 and 8.

Simple? No, not really.