

The whole weasel question

by [Brian Doyle](#) in the [February 6, 2013](#) issue

Consider the case of a mathematician, in this case  
My oldest brother, who is (a) halved by an illness,  
(b) stilled completely by it, and (c) reduced to ash.  
Trust me, he would be the first to note that finally  
He finished his travels at 0.00416666667 of what  
He weighed for a long time. I bet then he'd spend  
Weeks poking into what else weighed exactly that.  
I'd get a terse note with a list in his meticulous ink:  
*The cardinal on average weighs 0.992 of a pound,  
And the long-tailed weasel weighs exactly a pound.*  
A letter like that is exactly like a zen koan, I think.  
It's as much a door as a statement. Let us consider  
That we have all just now received this terse letter.  
It sits there grinning on the table next to the coffee.  
I don't know about you, but *I* am going to dive into  
The whole weasel question. We have so little time,  
And there's so much to be discovered. I want to be  
Able to be conversant about this the next time I see  
My brother. He'll want to know. He'll have missed  
A *lot* of time that could have been devoted to these  
Things, and *someone* has to carry the ball, whether  
It's weasels or cardinals or cancer. How mortifying  
It will be if he asks me about something, and I have  
To say *I didn't pay attention, man*, and he will stare  
At me with that laser stare and not even have to say,  
And what was it you did instead of paying attention?