

5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

“What would happen if you got scared half to death *twice*?” my friend asked during our free period.

At first glance, the idea of halves can seem quite simplistic: Fractions are something taught in grade school. However, when applying Zeno’s paradoxes, the idea of halves can become incredibly confusing.

The musical “Amelie” first exposed me to this set of philosophical and mathematical problems. They are deployed as a plot device. After listening to the soundtrack, I became curious and looked up this concept so that I could understand them more.

The basic idea is that to find an endpoint one must reach a halfway point. From there, one strives for another halfway point. The pattern is infinite. Therefore, it doesn’t matter how many times this process is repeated; an endpoint will never be reached.

This is an interesting idea but difficult to apply in real life. I tried with a cross country race. The good news: I felt like I could complete the 5K in pieces. I would complete 2.5K and think, “Oh good, I’m halfway.” Then, I’d have the same thought later when I finished three-quarters of the race. However, it was very discouraging to think that no matter how much I ran there would always be another halfway point to reach.

Frankly, it’s all quite troubling: I’ll only get closer to my goal but never achieve it. After months of extreme existentialism, I concluded that I needed to solve Zeno’s paradoxes. If I could figure out these philosophical problems, they would no longer bother me. I could start achieving and stop having fractions chasing me in my nightmares.

Unfortunately, this idea didn’t go as planned: I didn’t solve an ancient Greek paradox as a fifteen-year-old kid. But I came to three of my own solutions.

1) Instead of becoming discouraged when we are trying to reach a large goal, we need to learn to take time to celebrate the smaller milestones that are helping us to achieve the larger one. Yes, it’s human nature to keep striving after massive outcomes. But if we can’t look at the smaller things we’ve accomplished along the way, we’ll get overwhelmed and never even get close to finishing. This is what happened to me when I first started to compete. I’d get stressed out thinking about the entire race instead of tackling it in pieces.

2) Occasionally, we must meet in the middle. This conclusion becomes particularly interesting when multiple people must reach an agreement. Compromise requires learning to work with others. This past year, I was part of the team that redesigned our school uniforms. The students and faculty that came in with their minds already made up had a difficult time listening and understanding others’ viewpoints. It wasn’t until we started to function as a team that we put together a uniform that pleased everyone.

3) Sometimes, we just need to throw ancient Greek paradoxes out the window. Despite theoretically always needing to reach another halfway point while running a 5K, I still somehow always cross the finish line.

Zeno’s paradoxes will, unfortunately, continue to remain unsolved. Still, we can all come to our own personal solutions and determine how we let them affect us. I now try to celebrate my smaller achievements as I work towards a large goal and I listen and compromise as I collaborate with others. Moreover, I run my 5Ks with my head held high until I reach the finish line.

But back to the question, “What happens if you get scared half to death twice?” This remark was meant as a joke. Yet, I took her comment as an opportunity to explain Zeno’s paradoxes and explain that no matter how many times you get scared half to death you will never be truly dead. My answer: You’ll only be 75-percent dead.