

Spoken whirred

Public speaking comes naturally to this trio, writes

Blanche Clark

AN IMPROMPTU speech on the stupidity of humans and an eight-minute talk on education reform proved a winning combination for year-11 student Sam Scaife.

The Perth Modern School teenager won yesterday's National Plain English Speaking Awards, taking humanity to task for its lack of thought in everyday situations.

"I used the example of the Whopper or the meal at home, how these everyday conflicts have led to world epidemics of obesity and issues like that," the 16-year-old says.

Scaife has been doing public speaking for about four years and he memorises his speeches.

"I think you are more fluent and passionate when you speak that way," he says.

He thrived on the chance to compete against top students from all over Australia.

"It was brilliant. It was great to watch," he says of the four-hour competition, which took place at St Martin's Youth Arts Centre in South Yarra.

Also dispelling the myth that teenagers only grunt or Tweet were runner-up Tim Matthews, of Caringbah High School in NSW, and Victorian finalist Morgan Koegel, of Lauriston Girls' School. Matthews will accompany Scaife to London to compete in the international competition next May.



Three speech: (from left) Morgan Koegel, Sam Scaife and Tim Matthews. Picture: BEN SWINNERTON

Each of the eight finalists had to prepare an eight-minute speech and a three-minute impromptu speech.

Matthews, 17, chose to talk about consumer ethics and social responsibility in business for his long speech.

"It was different and off the beaten path and something people don't tend to think about," he says.

"But we should think about where the profits the companies we pay go."

It took him about a month to create his speech.

"I think public speaking is great," he says. "I'm an argumentative person by

nature, and being able to express yourself and being articulate is a skill that sets you up for life, so I'm told."

For her eight-minute speech, Koegel, 17, spoke about capital punishment.

"I'm incredibly passionate about bringing an end to capital punishment," she says.

"I grew up in the States and we do have capital punishment, unfortunately, and so moving to Australia, I wanted to find a way to continue speaking out against it, in settings such as this."

She hopes to study media and communications at University of Melbourne next year, with a view to a career in politics or social work.

The Plain English Speaking Awards started in Victoria in 1977 and went national in 1978.

Organiser Carole Lander, of the VCAA, says the students enjoy meeting like-minded peers from around the country.

They get to visit local sites and this week the finalists visited the State Library, NGV and saw a game of footy.

Lander says 200 Victorian students competed this year and she would like to see more students take part next year.

"Oral communication is in the VCE curriculum; all we do is ask the teachers to promote it and see what their students can do in a competitive and friendly environment," she says.