Test specifications

(Alderson, Wall & Clapham, 1995)

Background to the test specifications
1. What are test specifications??
    a. Information about what (e.g., vocabulary) and how (e.g., multiple-choice) should be tested.
2. Who needs test specifications?
    a. Test developers
    b. Test administrators and raters
    c. Test takers
3. What form should test specifications have?
    a. E.g., a Word document

Which information should be in the test specifications? Which questions should be answered?

1. What is the purpose of the test? For example, is it an achievement, placement, or proficiency test,
2. What is the target group of the test? For example, sign language learners in the 3rd semester of a sign language interpreting programme, between 20-25 years old, …
3. How many sections should the test have? How are the different parts weighted? For example, a section on production (30 minutes long, 60% of the total grade) and a section on comprehension (45 minutes, 40% of the total grade)
4. What target language situations are envisaged for the test? For example, a conversation between a doctor and a patient in a proficiency test or the general proficiency in a sign language for someone to be hired at a university.
5. Which text types should be chosen (e.g., formal presentation in sign language)? How authentic is the text? Who is the supposed audience? What should be the topic, the length, and the difficulty? For example, students respond to multiple choice questions based on a five-minute presentation in sign language.
6. What language skills should be tested? For example, students produce a presentation in sign language. Both the overall structure of the presentation (i.e., more general skills) and grammar and use of vocabulary are evaluated (more specific skills).
7. Which testing method will be used? (What type of tasks and items should be used?) For example, multiple choice, short answer questions, gap-filling questions, simulation of real language use situations.
8. How many tasks and items are used in each paper/part of the test? For example, 10 for production and 20 for comprehension.
9. What rubrics are used as instructions for test takers? Are examples required so that the test taker knows what is being expected by him or her? In which language should the rubric be delivered?
10. What criteria are used in order to score the language performance of the test taker (production)? For example, the use of non-manuals, the correct use of manual components, vocabulary etc. How are these different criteria weighted?
11. How are the test results communicated and what are the consequences?